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ABSTRACT

A national advisory group of the Canadian Congress for Learning Opportunities for Women (CCLOW) developed a proposal for an exploratory research project examining how gender and the power balance of male-female relationships affect women's access to/experience of literacy programs. A researcher was selected to conduct the following project activities: visit four communities across Canada and converse with women in literacy programs in each community; report the findings of the visits; develop research questions and a methodology for a long-term national action research project that would be conducted in partnership with a variety of programs; and develop a proposal for the subsequent phase of the project. The researcher synthesized the results of her conversations into 21 interconnected themes. After analyzing those themes, CCLOW agreed to sponsor a second phase of the study. The proposed study was to be a participatory study in which two women from each of several programs across Canada would participate in training workshops and examined the effects of literacy programs on their lives and vice versa. (Appended are the following: discussion of CCLOW's mission/activities; and profiles of the members of CCLOW's national advisory committee and project researcher. Contains 117 references. (MN)

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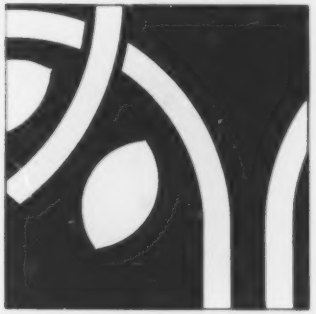
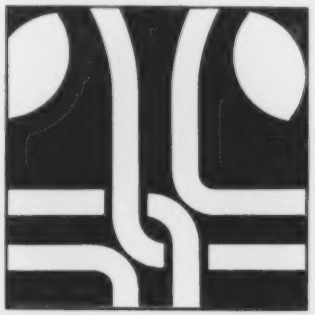
Discovering the Strength of Our Voices

Women and literacy programs



by Betty-Ann Lloyd

The report from phase one of a research project



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"It is difficult to help others
discover the strength of their voices
if we are speaking in whispers ourselves."

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This work is dedicated to the women who spoke with us during visits to the four communities.

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1-1 Goals for the research project
Objectives for the first, exploratory stage

The original proposal outlined goals for both the first, exploratory stage and the second, action research stage:

- to examine how gender and the power balance of the male/female relationship affect women's access to, and experience of, literacy programs and how it affects the impact of literacy programs on women,
- to determine how literacy programs and literacy practice might be changed to better respond to the reality of the lives of adult women learners, and
- to share this information with women literacy students and workers, through print materials and in workshops, to foster the development of relevant, appropriate, and accessible literacy learning opportunities for women.

The first, exploratory phase of the research had the following objectives:

- to talk with women literacy students and workers who are currently involved in literacy programs,
- to develop key questions out of the "data" of the women's stories, and
- to develop a research design to investigate these questions further using an action research model.

1 This first phase of the research project was an exploratory process —to discover some questions that might focus the next stage

Much of the research already completed on women's experience and literacy programs looks at how women are affected by their involvement or lack of involvement in literacy programs. To some extent, this reflects the point of view that programs are organized to "fix" the people who participate, rather than the structures within which the people live, work and study.

Also, much of the work with women's experience and literacy programs has been theoretical or directed toward policy development. The social construction of women's reality and the role of gender in determining their involvement and success in upgrading has been a major focus. Research already completed by CCLOW has determined that women experience particular barriers to learning and that these barriers may be individually overcome through such things as flexible program schedules, childcare, transportation, counselling and other support services, and appropriate curriculum and materials (MacKeracher et al. n.d.).

CCLOW research has also determined that government policy development in terms of equal pay for work of equal value and equal employment opportunity (including affirmative action) are essential for women's participation in educational and training activities. Without the restructuring of both work and family life in the formal and non-formal sectors of the economy, women will continue to struggle with the double and triple day and with the expectation of subordinate status on both a private and public level. This restructuring requires not only effective policy development but also public education and community action (for example, Wismer 1988).

CCLOW and the national advisory committee conceived of the first phase of this project as taking the research one step further—exploring the ways in which a national, action research project could begin to document the realities of women's experience as they actually worked within literacy programs as students and as staff. At the program level this would be participatory research. It would be based on a social context model of literacy, intended to raise essential questions about women's experience in literacy programs within the context of their entire lives.

The theoretical methodology would be action research: "the systematic collection and analysis of information for the purpose of informing political action and social change." (Barnsley et al.)

This first phase would include input from women in literacy programs. The second phase would include involvement of women in literacy programs.

1-2 Origins of the research design for this first phase

A national advisory group of CCLOW members developed the initial proposal, conceptualized the project and hired the researcher. The design of the first stage took part within a framework developed during a teleconference call between the researcher, committee members and the executive director. Much of it built on discussions among the advisory committee members during the preceding months. We agreed that the researcher would:

- visit four communities and have conversations with women in literacy programs (the four communities were determined by geographic considerations, the programs in the community and advisory committee members' availability to take part in the process),
- prepare a final report for the first phase using the data from the visits,
- develop research questions and a methodology for a long-term national action research project that would be carried out in partnership with a variety of programs,
- develop a proposal for this second phase project.

1-3 The research process during the first phase—the ways in which it was organized

As the researcher for this first, exploratory phase, I want to provide the context in which the work took place. The mandate of CCLOW, outlined in Appendix 5-1, provided the guiding principles. The advisory committee members, described in 5-2, contributed their interpretations of these principles and their own perspectives during the process. My experience as researcher, also outlined in 5-2, greatly influenced what words were said and where there were silences, what words were heard and how the silences were observed, how the words and the silences were built into a narrative and how that narrative is presented.

In this section, I will set out the chronological structure of what happened during the research process. In section 1-4 are the "facts" about the communities I visited and the people I spoke with. In the next section are four snapshots of the communities, structured around the questions that guided the experiential learning process of the research. After that, I have included the questions I formulated at the beginning of the research, immediately after visiting each community, midway through the research and at the end of the research. These are connected to the themes that emerged from the conversations at the same time that they provide a framework. By providing this sense of the process, I hope we begin to understand how the "data" and the analysis developed.

I started in early May 1990 by setting up an administrative framework and travel schedule. I did some re-reading in research and in women and literacy to immerse myself in the project. At the same time, I had several intense conversations with women about the ethics of feminist research, particularly research with women who are participating in literacy and upgrading programs. I studied CCLOW research documents, minutes and mission statements to develop a sense of the organization's mandate and current direction. (The bibliography is available in Appendix 5-3.)

1-4 The "facts" concerning the visits to the communities

I visited four very different communities: one on the west coast, one on the east coast, one in central Canada and one in the north. They have populations of 1,200 people, 4,225 people, 96,216 people and 606,000 people.

I spent four days in the west coast community. I talked formally with 24 people, all of them involved with the same community college campus. Twenty-two are women and two are men. Two work as administrators, two are volunteer tutors, two are support staff, two are counsellors, five are instructors, two are community education workers and nine are students.

I spent four days in the east coast community, talking with 17 people. All of them are women. One is a community activist with a history of adult education and literacy work with women. Three women work at a community-based program, one is a student in that program. I met with a community college instructor, three women who work at a bridging program for women and three women who work at a transition house for women who have been battered by men. I met with four tutors and a staff member of a volunteer one-to-one program.

I spent five days in a central Canadian community and met with 10 people, nine women and one man. One teaches English as a second language in a union-based program, five are literacy workers in community-based programs, one is a volunteer tutor and board member, one is a student and two are researchers. I also met with CCLOW staff.

continued on next page ...

I also began to travel and talk. In each community, I collected an average of 15 hours of taped interviews. I collected significant other information through observation and less formal discussion.

When I returned to my office, I reviewed all the tapes and transcribed those portions that spoke to questions that had arisen in other communities and that arose out of the most recent visit. I also recorded my own reflections in the context of the other work I had been doing for the project.

I focussed these reflections in the research questions, and out of the questions came a growing and progressively more coherent set of issues and assumptions.

There were three teleconference calls with members of the advisory committee, supplemented by calls and contacts with individual members. I kept checking back that my own reflections were congruent with others who either knew the issues and communities or had a feminist research perspective that allowed them to ask useful questions.

At the half-way mark, writing the interim report gave me an opportunity to provide the first account of what was happening. At the same time, a day-long meeting with two researchers not directly involved in the project—Elaine Gaber-Katz and Susan Wismer—gave me an opportunity to present, defend and get a new perspective on what was actually happening both to the research and to my own place within it.

I then carried on with the last two visits, with the writing of a second interim report, a proposal for the National Literacy Secretariat for the second stage research and the writing of this final document.

I was contracted to do this research over "a minimum of 60 days." The minimum was spent by the time I began writing the final report and the process since then has been one of discovery that is difficult to chart in terms of time. I don't think any woman's life breaks down easily into time spent doing dishes or shopping separate from time spent asking questions and trying to find answers. Some of us, however, for brief periods of time have the privilege of combining the questions of our lives and the the questions of our work. For that I am thankful.

1-4 The "facts" concerning the visits, continued . . .

I spent five days in a northern community. I met with 10 people, nine women and one man. Three are instructors, two are administrators, one is a bureaucrat and four are students. All but one are associated with the community college campus.

In all, I met with 61 people, more or less formally, in interview or group discussions. Thirty-four participate at some level in community college programs. Twenty are involved in community-based programs. Three sit somewhere in between. Three are researchers and one is a bureaucrat, involved in literacy and upgrading.

Fifty-seven are women, four are men. I have made some assumptions around race: that 48 are white and 13 are Black, East Indian, Native or Inuit. Fifteen were adult upgrading students at the time I talked with them. Others indicated they had been adult upgrading students in the recent past. I don't know everyone's age, but I will guess that eight might be under 30, 45 between 30-45 and eight over 45.

While the numbers may give you one small part of the picture, they can really tell you almost nothing. For example, a **fact** may be that 34 people work within the context of three different community college programs. A **truth** is that each campus was completely different from the other and perhaps none of them fit anyone's stereotype of "a community college." This is true not only because some of the "institutions" were smaller in size than some of the "community programs," but also because some of the women in the community programs are working in more isolation from other women, particularly from feminist women, than some of the women within the "institutions."

2 What does it mean for us to think and talk about ourselves as "women"?

The women from each of the four communities I visited contributed something unique to this research.

Part of the uniqueness came from their location in time.

- When did I go to that particular community—in the first month of the research, or in the last?
- What questions did I want to explore at that particular time?
- Who did I speak to before I visited them?
- Who did I know came next?

Part of the uniqueness came from their location in space.

- How is the west coast different from the east?
- What can we say about southern Ontario cities?
- What can we say about northern territorial settlements?

Part of the uniqueness came from the lives of the particular women.

- How do women who are literacy students speak about their experience?
- Where do women who are paid literacy workers find their voice?
- In what sense do Native women in BC share a language with Inuit women?
- Do women with children tell the same stories? Women who are older?

These four shapshots of a particular experience in each community in no way tell the whole story of that visit. They do, however, focus the way in which my experience, as the researcher, was shaped by each visit. Part of this shaping comes from the experiential learning cycle:

I moved from beginning with basic questions and participating as an observer, to reflecting on my observations, conversations and readings, to trying to understand and analyze the experience through themes and issues, to strategizing around the next activity.

I focussed that experiential process after the visits with a set of questions:

- What do we do when we begin to talk among ourselves as women?
- When we begin to listen to women's stories, what do we hear about ourselves?
- Why do we need to pay attention to women's stories once we begin to hear them?
- When we hear women's stories about their lives, how do we begin to "do" literacy?

In the next section, the left-hand page contains excerpts from interviews from the community visit described on the right.

"We're all here to learn. It should be equal."

"I would be scared to talk. I don't know why. That's all. It's hard for me .... I'm shy from ladies too, not only from men."

"I find it's harder because of ... sticking away from **everybody** because they don't treat me right .... Because woman.... because don't trust... because assaulted."

"Well, there's something I would like to say, but I think that it's way off. [Go for it.] Men have always had the power. And I guess it's, well, for me it's harder because I'm more open. I think girls are more open than boys and get hurt more. And like, your friends and all, they get closed up, to a point, and then everybody just sticks to themselves and you can't really get in touch. Like you can't be friends with anybody because they're shut off to a point. [Kind of like protection.] Hmmhmm."

"I think ladies have more responsibility than guys do. There's times when I drifted off because I know I left something undone and there were days I couldn't concentrate because I knew there was something I didn't do at home or someplace else .... You can't really concentrate because we have more responsibility than a guy does. He can come and go and he doesn't have to look after the kids and cooking and cleaning and things that we have to do. I think that what we're kind of lacking is we don't give enough time for ourself and we're not really thinking of us instead of a lot of other things."

"What she said. I want to come to school and I have to look after two families, my parents, my sister, sometimes my in-laws too. I decide I am coming to school. It's very hard. I wish somebody was there to help me, but nobody is there to help me. My husband he just go to work. He helps me, but not like ...."

2-1 What do we do when we begin to talk among ourselves as "women"

A group of nine women students from a community college on the west coast is sitting around a table with one of their instructors and myself. We have agreed to meet for the next three days from 10:15 to 12:15. The sun is coming in through a wall of windows as we head into the last half hour of discussion for this first day. Already, we've gone round the table with questions like—

- How did you know there were classes here at this campus?
- What kind of changes did you have to make in your life in order to come?
- Did anyone help you make some of these changes?
- What surprised you about the classes?

Now an instructor, who is facilitating the group, talks a bit more about how I have come to find out about women's experience with upgrading programs. She asks us to think about how their experience, as women, might be different from the experience of the men who are at the college. It is clearly a difficult question and there is not a lot of response. Finally, one of the women says, "How would we know the difference?" Other women laughed in relief as they reflected back the statements, "We haven't been men. We don't know what their experience is!" Also, some words and body language said, "We haven't thought of ourselves as women here, different from the men."

Towards the end of the second day, the instructor asks the question:

- Do you think this group would be different if there were men here?

There is an immediate vocal and body response to this question with many of us laughing, making faces and moving around. There is much less hesitation around this question—partly because it is a more concrete question and partly because we've discussed being women for two days now. We feel free to agree and disagree with each other—despite our differences in age, race, culture and formal education.

Do you think this group would be different if there were men here?

- I think it would be extremely different! I think that a lot of us would shut up! I don't think we would be as open as we are in talking about the things we've been talking about .... Because they're men.
- Maybe because you start to feel like they might not understand. It's like sometimes you're talking about certain things you just don't want to talk to men about. Because sometimes women just like to talk among themselves. I'm sure men are the same way. Because they feel sort of self conscious too in opening up their problems. They talk to other guys all the time. Or to their friends.
- Well usually when you're in a group discussion women are more apt to be more open .... I think it's just because the way you feel, you feel a bit more uptight maybe .... You talk about how they're going to react .... I feel a lot better in all-women groups just because you think well, she understands how I feel about it, just because she is a woman. Because she's got the same problems maybe. Just even though she's a different kind of person. You think, she knows how you feel. It's just easier talking. You feel more comfortable because they're the same as you.
- I like it better in a mixed group, really.... Sometimes these men, it's good for them to know our problems. It's nice to be able to understand men, to tell them how you feel. Sometimes I think there's not enough communication between people. They do have all the same needs and wants. They do have all the same problems really.

"There's a little bit of fear on our part. What's going to be the point? They're going to tell us all this stuff and there's nothing we can do about it. They know there's nothing we can do about it. They just want to tell somebody else. And they don't have anybody they can talk to .... Plus, we don't bring it outside .... As if she sat down with her neighbour and said the same kind of thing well everybody on the street's going to know."

"I mean, women come in here with no self-esteem. Now, we can pretty much work with that .... But we don't know how to deal with violence in the home. I mean, they're not going to leave the home anyway. But to be able to tell them how they might deal with it if they are home .... How to deal even with large families who are probably always bugging her because one or the other's always needing attention. The baby's always crying or she's having a hard time with the husband. Probably not violence on the part of beating, but nagging, or not there to help, or whatever. To be able to talk to and tell them, 'This is maybe what you could do or whatever.' "

"If you're sitting down to me and you're telling me that, 'I have been sexually abused since the time that I was a child, my mother was a prostitute, I have been a prostitute.' And you're saying to me, 'what do I do, am I crazy ... am I a dirty person, am I a terrible person.' I mean not having the experience of having helped women walk through some of that, it's where we really lacked. Luckily enough, there were enough connections with women at the transition house so I could call up a feminist counsellor and say, 'Look, this is what's going on. What do I say?'—'Well, let them talk. Cool it. Don't send them to this person.' But it's like feeling that you're on the edge of a cliff all the time and not quite knowing what's being stirred up here and whether there is special assistance needed or whatever. Not knowing was the biggest."

2-2 When we begin to listen to women's stories, what do we hear about ourselves?

In an east coast community centre, three paid literacy instructors, a literacy student and the program co-ordinator have got together over coffee and doughnuts to talk with me about women's experience and literacy programs. We're not sure how long we'll go on—there's about three hours left before lunch. The program itself is finished for the summer and everyone has just come in to chat.

Four of the women live in the immediate community. One has lived there in the past, but now lives further out. Two of the instructors were once students in the program. The third instructor was a volunteer before she came on as paid staff. The co-ordinator has been an instructor as well as one of the founding mothers.

We told each other a lot of stories as children played downstairs and other community workers drifted in and out. I had my "interview schedule," a list of topics that I like to cover during each time together. But the conversation kept coming back to what it means to be women listening to other women, hearing stories of poverty, violence, isolation and sexual abuse.

We obviously knew what the issues were. We knew about women who came to the program saying, "I can either get the bus to this program, or I can send my children to school with a lunch. That's my choice. I don't have money for both."

We talked together about what it meant to want not only to listen, but to have enough money to give her the bus fare, to feed her children. We also talked about not wanting to give advice, to give easy answers, as "experts," to incredibly difficult questions.

Finally we started to look at the photo albums that highlighted the good times of partying, travelling, showing off the learning. It became clear that, as women we have a lot of respect for ourselves and for others. But also it was clear that respect can be hard to hold on to in the face of trying to actually make a difference, in the face of poverty, violence, isolation and sexual abuse.

We can't keep talking if we feel so bad, like we can't get on ...

- But [group] got to be too much for us after a while. I got to the point that I couldn't —because I didn't know what to do with it.
- They were taking the hurt home with them. And they were sat down at home with this good meal, wondering if [the others] had a meal at all.
- It really gets to be ...
- You can't save the world.
- ... I know that but it doesn't help.
- I mean how much can you take in and then let it go. A lot of people can leave at five and forget it. I'm not one of those. And then when you have an outside life besides, it's like too much. And you need someone to tell you things so that you can learn how to let that go when you leave. So someone like that would be really good. Because someone like me ....
- Yes, me too. You can't let it go. You bring it home with you.
- They tell you things that are really mindboggling. Things that you read about and you don't tend to believe and then all of a sudden you're sitting with a person that's living that lifestyle and it's really hard
- even to feel comfortable with your response
- because you can make an awful big mistake. They can walk out through the door and you might never see them again or they took you wrong ....

"The women's program changed the program and me and everybody here on how we work with women. [Because?] Because we talked about it. And we were forced to look at things that we didn't have to look at, in order to make it accessible to women."

"I think that a lot of things get talked about here. They get talked about because something happens and everybody will talk about it on staff. So there seems to be concern. And yet, lots of times, whatever we've thought about or we've said we would do, doesn't go anywhere. And, actually, like again, I think that some of it has to do with the fact that literacy isn't considered to be—like that isn't the main work of literacy, dealing with that stuff. Although we all know that we do, to some extent. But because it's not clearly acknowledged it's hard to find the time or the place or the way to go through what you wanted to do or what everybody said they wanted to do. And to actually feel that you're dealing with what you're feeling. And so I think that we probably talk a lot more about issues than we actually act on here .... I don't really know how to make a transition. I haven't known how to make a transition from a place that was about dealing with that to a place that doesn't have any mechanism for dealing with it. Even though people talk about it ...."

"The staff all kind of had a discussion about [possible sexual assault incident]. And we realized that he was preventing her, and then subsequent women—I mean we were trying to be learner-centred in giving this guy literacy, but felt that he was a barrier to women in the program. And see, he was really smart. It was really hard to pin him down between his rights as an individual and his—because we're not detectives and we're not lawyers—his rights as an individual and his freedom. Because we say literacy is a right—his right to have literacy. But we always would go in favour of the women, saying that because there had been other barriers in people's lives, this was one more barrier. I mean you get in and then you get harassed."

2-3 Why do we need to pay attention to women's stories once we begin to hear them?

In the central Canadian city that I visited, there are a large number of community-based programs. Several of them have developed classes or working groups particularly for women. Others have a large majority of women participants. I visited some of these programs and talked with a variety of literacy workers—paid staff and volunteers, women and men.

We met in the programs, surrounded by materials, students, other literacy workers. I wanted to start talking about what happens when programs decide to focus on women. How do the programs change when they become more conscious of women's lives, women's reality? How do the women themselves, students and workers, change? What happens with the men?

As we talked, it seemed like layers of meaning peeled away for us all. "It sort of just filters down into probably a lot of small things, or not small things, but things that are subtle .... You look at it and then you start to see all these little layers underneath. It's really strange."

As we talked, we seemed to be taking all the "little layers," all the "small things" and putting together a picture that could be used to finish the phrase, "Maybe this is why that happened, maybe ...."

One of the women talked about how, as she listened to other women's stories and heard what they were saying, she had to learn about cruelty. She had to learn how cruel people could be. Once she learned that, she had to begin to see the cruelty all around her—including in her own program. Then, she had to decide what it meant that women were now telling their stories, and programs didn't seem to be responding.

Another worker expressed the lack of response in another way: "I guess we work on crying needs around here ... We respond to crises." Women's stories are about their everyday lives and, distressing though they may be, for most people it requires a major change in perspective to see each one as worthy of attention. Not only worthy of attention in terms of individual "help," but in terms of saying something about our society.

Why does hearing women's stories make a difference?

- I think to some extent there is a lot of discussion around [differences between men and women] here among the staff. And I've wondered whether it came from the fact that a women's group was run here or maybe it always was. But I also heard [women students] remembering things that came from the women's group. Or understandings that happened. Like I think that the whole thing around trying to get a child-care fund really came or gelled from the women's group. I mean it may have been talked and thought about before, but I think that there, that there were actions actually taken about it.
- I think we do say that having done the women's group, and having discovered certain things, we now let those things change the organization and make it different. And that is true, I guess. But, it could not be true at the same time. And who's there to see if it's true or not? Certainly the [same] women students aren't there because the forum for the voices has gone ....
- In different ways forums **did** spring up again. Not because we did women's groups, but because we did that ... project, because of certain dynamics that were happening in the organization and different things that were happening. Women's voices did start getting heard again. It wasn't because we—our staff as an organization—were deliberately creating the space. It may be all right. I don't know. I don't know.

"I don't start with 'I am a woman.' No. I start 'I am a person.' I am a person like anybody else. I deserve to be treated like anybody else. I am a person before I am anything else. Before I am a woman, before I am a Native. Anything else. And I deserve to be heard. As a person, I can help somebody else, too. That is what gives me the greatest satisfaction is helping somebody else. And I think I was put here on earth to serve people because that's what makes me whole and that's what makes me happy. To help other people. Sometimes I don't act that way! Especially when I start off wrong—but I think for now it's my reason to be here: In this college, in this community, in this world. And when you are helping others, you learn a lot!"

"One girl took the first job she'd ever had in her life. It was a cashier at the grocery store. But I think that took a certain amount of hauling yourself up out of a rut and saying I'm going to do this, earn a wage. Especially when her husband didn't work. It was putting herself in a vulnerable position. A threatening position. So it must have taken something inside of herself to do that. And she obviously took a lot of joy out of doing that, out of being in that job."

"The radio program is a very good idea for women, because they are the ones who are usually at home, listening to the radio. And that way they can learn to read and write, or they can help me. A lot of times they do—especially the elder women. They'll call me and say 'This is how you say this,' or 'No, it's done this way.' So they give us support. For some reason, Inuit women don't just come out and talk. Like I work here in the college. I hardly get any calls here during the day. But at the radio where everybody's listening and they can hear me, then they'll call me and give me advice. So there is an interest."

2-4 When we hear women's stories about their lives, how do we begin to "do" literacy

I met with women in a variety of places in this northern community of 1,200. Out on the back stoop of a house, trying to catch the last of the summer's sun. In the adult learning centre of the community college. At "Stitch," a weekly get-together of women in the community. On the back of a four-wheel ATV going across the tundra to collect the best drinking water from a brook. Perched on beds in a motel room. In a living room with numbers of small children drifting in and out. At the co-op. Out on the road at night.

There are three literacy programs in this community, each of them with a formal structure. One of them is a women-only program in English, one is women and men in English, one is women and men in Inuktitut. There is also, clearly, an informal structure for each that fits not only women's lives here, but the lives of everyone who lives in a small, isolated community.

It reminded me of my life and work in a rural Cape Breton community and it was also unlike anything I had ever experienced before. It was easy not to be romantic about it all, because the hardships of northern life are very real and very present. On the other hand, it was difficult not to be drawn into the very direct way in which women look at what is actually happening and then begin to work out what that means for what they are doing.

If the need is to redefine "literacy" or redefine "programs" they seem to spend the time reflecting on the concrete needs of everyone in the community and the implications of what they are actually doing. The theory comes out of the practice.

As one woman said to me, "Just because something is true, does not mean it is true." So why should we stick to what has been real for others if it is not real for us?

She also said to me, "People in the south think too much!" Live with what you are doing—just let it be real on its own—as long as that reality comes out of experience rather than thinking too much!

I think I know that because I was there ...

- I think that feeling that you're not a person, that you're not important and what you say is not going to be heard and what you do is no good, because you can't do it—I think I know that because I was there ....
- It took a long time to be able to say "I'm a person and I'm just as good as anybody else, sometimes even better." But I think I have proven to myself I can be what I want and I can use programs to better myself. That's the attitude I have towards everything—it has a great deal to do with what I have now ....
- The women who came to our evening upgrading—I know one that was even afraid to go out and now she talks and she visits around and almost seems a different person .... I didn't see any improvements, great improvements, in her writing and reading skills, but her attitude and the way she acts towards the world is completely different now. And that is what I call literacy.
- She took control of part of her life that she wasn't controlling before. And to me that's literacy. Learning how to do things for yourself. And we see a lot of that. It's almost like watching a garden grow. Flowers blooming. That's what excites me is to see other people find themselves, how to watch out for themselves, help themselves.
- Because, I think especially here, women have to learn how to be proud of themselves, to think they're special, build their self-confidence. And once they get over that, they can almost do anything. If they want to do upgrading—they'll succeed. But if they keep on saying, "I'm just a woman. I'm just an Inuk. I don't have any skills ...." They are special, I think. Until we learn to help them see that, I don't think we can do much more. We can drill them and drill them with mathematics and stuff like that. But what good is that if they won't use it because they lack self confidence?

3 How can we understand what we hear when we listen to women—then ask questions, look at our assumptions and identify issues

As I participated in formal and informal conversations with women in the four communities, I realized at some point I would have to begin "understanding" what we were talking about. I would have to interpret what we were saying and what we weren't saying in terms of the research questions.

To a certain extent, that means I went into the conversations with an agenda—with a general list of topics I wanted to talk about. This agenda was not the same in each community. In the last section, I outlined how I heard some of what was said in terms of an experiential learning process. I also heard, and organized what I was hearing, in terms of the issues that had been raised in earlier conversations and in terms of issues I identified as I listened to the tapes after the conversations were over.

These questions, the questions that followed each visit, became the way in which I organized my "field notes." This not only allowed me to check back with some of the women who had participated in those conversations, it also gave me a framework within which to go forward.

Halfway through the project I put everything I had transcribed or written away. Then, I developed a set of questions that I thought focussed what was going on so far. These are the interim questions.

At the end of all the visits and trancriptions, I repeated this process. These are the questions that supplement the interim questions. In significant ways, the tension between the first set and the second set provide the framework for strategizing about the future.

At the same time as I was developing the questions, I was organizing excerpts from the taped interviews into general themes—somewhat along the same lines as the questions—but cutting across time and space. These themes are included here. Finally, in the next section are the words of the women who generated the themes. The selection of excerpts opens up the time and space of the research, but is limited by the time and space of this report. It is important that we remember to respect the words that are not included and also those that weren't said.

The first questions concern issues around the feminist research process

- What right do we have as women, as researchers, to insert ourselves into other women's lives and raise issues that cannot be resolved during our time together?
- What responsibilities do we have, as feminists, around the consciousness of other women and the effects of consciousness on their lives?
- What responsibilities do we have, as feminists, in providing women with community before we intentionally raise issues of consciousness?
- How do these responsibilities change when those of us who are inserting ourselves have positions of relative privilege?
- How do these responsibilities change when we assume the label of "feminist" for ourselves or for others?
- Is there a position of feminist integrity around the issue of "consciousness at any price"?
- Is there a position of feminist integrity around refusing to raise consciousness when the opportunity arises—even though there may be a price for either or both women?
- Who should decide these issues—and for whom?

Throughout we can continue to hear these questions:

What do we do when we begin to talk among ourselves as women?

When we begin to listen to women's stories, what do we hear about ourselves?

Why do we need to pay attention to women's stories once we begin to hear them?

When we hear women's stories about their lives, how do we begin to "do" literacy?

And a particular concern that came out of meetings with the advisory committee: How can we acknowledge that we, as women, live different lives because of our race, our class, our culture, our sexuality, our physical, mental, emotional and spiritual abilities, our formal education levels, our immigration status, our first language, our rural, urban and suburban locations, our opportunities for employment, our relation to children, our religions . . . .

3-1 The words women spoke during the visits have been organized into 21 interconnected themes

Some women want to understand the similarities between us all. Some want to make sure we recognize the differences. Others would simply like to be treated as a person.

Women believe that there are some things they know about how women learn, and how they work alone and in groups. They also know what they have been told about women.

Women have a lot of ideas about how they are able to learn what they want to learn by building on their strengths—particularly building on their strengths in community.

Women talk about the different reasons why they and others cannot come to literacy and upgrading programs. Usually women face more than one barrier.

Many women feel the way in which we have set up our social systems works against us. They stop us from moving forward and keep us entrenched in poverty.

Like most women who have to leave their homes to do what they want or need to do, women involved in literacy have difficulty with finding good, affordable childcare.

When women start to talk about some of the things that make it hard to get to programs, very often the first comments focus on responsibilities in the home, with their families.

Often, women realize that, for many women, the overwhelming responsibilities at home indicate that the real problem may be a lack of support from other family members.

Women are clear that this lack of support is not only passive resistance. Many, many women face violence from men if they dare to go back to school.

Despite the many barriers to their participation, women have no difficulty talking about why they want to take part in literacy and upgrading programs.

Some women indicate that they are very uncomfortable with the idea of women-only programs. It doesn't seem "natural" for women to talk alone together or work on their own.

Questions following reflection after the first visit, the visit to the west coast

- What is consciousness—personal, political, critical, women's, feminist?
- What about the men? Who is responsible for the men's consciousness?
- What does it mean to do research? What are the costs and benefits?
- What is "natural" for women? Are women-only situations natural?
- What is the difference between teaching, counselling, therapy, social work, and community development?
- What is the difference between the "we" of women literacy students and the "we" of women literacy workers in terms of consciousness, disclosure, responsibility?

Questions following reflection after the second visit, the visit to the east coast

- What is "advocacy" and what is "service delivery"? Who thinks advocacy and service delivery are different issues?
- How is "women's" experience different than the experience of poor "people"?
- What risks of violence are involved in talking about "women"?
- How do we work with the economic, physical, sexual, spiritual, emotional violence in women's lives?
- What does this work have to do with "literacy"?
- Of what earthly good is research? Why don't "we" do a revolution instead?

How do we weigh all the words so that we can hear some women speaking and some telling their stories through silences?

"I'm just telling you little wee bits and pieces because there's so much has happened in my life and now I want to make something of myself and try to support myself."

"Somehow what the students say—the voices that we should be listening to the most—without being kind of taken over—have to be made to have weight. And that's very hard to do for people who are not in the habit, really, of listening to those voices. You can either patronize those voices—'As you can see from the following three excerpts, we can prove that blah blah blah—which would bug me and please some people. On the other hand, the voices will not stand for themselves [for some people] to pay attention to them. They've heard the students tell these stories—so what?"

As others speak, however, they talk about the reasons they, or other women, want to take part in woman-positive, women-only programs, groups or activities.

Throughout the research process, women continued to discuss positive experiences they have had or the impact woman-positive activities have had on their program.

Some women shared longer stories about their experience with what actually happens when a women-only activity or program is put into place. There are no easy answers!

One story—partial as are all the stories here—true as are all the stories here—is potentially very different from other versions that might be told—and it's still the truth

When women begin to participate in woman-positive activities within their own programs, they talk of having to face the tensions between theory and practice.

When women organize woman-positive activities, they are confronted with the question: What about the men? Some women suggest the men need to look for the answers.

Some women talked about what happens when they start to talk with other women about their lives. For many of us, this process of consciousness can be painful.

Women in one program talked around a table together about what they see happening in their community—with other women and with themselves—as change begins to happen.

Women literacy workers often talk about the tensions they feel in the fine lines between their roles as teacher, counsellor, facilitator. How can they work responsibly?

For many women, the issue of responsibility of the literacy worker—to herself and to the women she works with—centres on the process of disclosure, of what we tell each other.

It would seem that, in the end, one of the consequences for literacy programs of honouring women's stories is that definitions of literacy are radically challenged.

Questions following reflection after the third visit, the visit to central Canada

- What does it mean to be learner-centred? What does it mean to be woman-positive? What do we learn by looking at how programs operate?
- What happens when we finish the thought: "What about the men? They will lose out." What will the men lose if we do something woman-positive?
- What happens when you raise issues of power relations within a work setting? Is it different in women-only settings?
- How do we, as women literacy students and literacy workers, balance the intellectual/emotional/physical/spiritual elements of our experience?

Questions following reflection after the last visit, the visit to the north

- How is women-as-culture different from women-as-gender?
- What happens when we ask the question "What about the men?" as feminist adult educators?
- How do we honour those things that are unspoken (unwritten/unread) but known? What place do "silence" and "secrets" have in literacy programs?
- What role can "faith," "hope" and "charity" play in our analysis and vision?
- How do we recognize the point when we begin to think too much?

Questions at the time of writing the interim report (in plain text) and at the time of writing the final report (in bold text)

- **What is "research"?**
- What does research do that may be useful in terms of improving women's experience in upgrading programs?
- **What does research do that may be useful in terms of improving the upgrading programs' response to women's experience?**
- Who can/should/may be doing this research? **What do they need in order to do it effectively?**

- **Who are the "women participants" in literacy programs?**
- How do we recognize the experience of women who participate as literacy workers and literacy students to affirm our commonality and recognize our differences?
- What part does "privilege" and "oppression" play in the way in which women participate together in a program, when they participate with men?

- Why would we—women literacy students and women literacy workers—want to focus on women and our experience in programs?

- **Why would we—women literacy students and women literacy workers—focus on the way in which upgrading programs respond to what they hear about women's experience?**

- What does it mean for a program to be "responsible" for/toward the experience of women participants?
- How can programs respond to the multiple layers of strength that women display within and without the programs?
- How can programs respond to the multiple layers of violence that women face within and without the programs?
- How can programs respond to women's experience in the context of their particular communities? This particular society?
- Do programs work with "literacy" and "learner-centred" in ways that mean they are "woman-positive?"
- **What happens when programs become aware of women's experience, decide to change, become more responsive?**
- What happens when programs become aware of women's experience, decide not to change, become less responsive?

- What about the men?
- Who are the men?
- Who will respond to the experience of the men?
- What are the men responsible for?
- What are programs responsible for in regard to the men? Is this different from what women are responsible for in regard to the men?
- What does adult education theory say about facilitating change in any individual or group?
- How does that happen in practice?

- How can "we," as women literacy students and women literacy workers, work together in a way that demonstrates responsibility?
- Does this mean "we" are feminist?
- Do "we" have feminist consciousness?

- How can "we," as women literacy students and women literacy workers, work with programs in a way that demonstrates responsibility?
- Does this mean "we" are feminist?
- Do "we" have feminist consciousness?

Some women want to understand the similarities between us all. Some want to make sure we recognize the differences. Others would simply like to be treated as a person.

• I don't like the emphasis being put on me being a woman. I don't like that. I want to be seen as a person with skills, knowledge, that can be used to help somebody else. Not necessarily because I am a woman. Sometimes that helps. But if I have a greatest wish in my life that can be given to me, I would say: Let people see me as a person. Just a person. Not a Native, not a woman, not from this family, not from this community but as a person.

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• It just made me realize how much we're all the same, even though certainly my background, my culture—I have a different culture and a different background than the other women in the program—how much we were the same. How they voiced **my** concerns and **my** perceptions.

It was scary sometimes. But very energizing—empowering—for me to know that I wasn't alone. It wasn't anything that I had done that made things in my life happen to me. Because they had experienced the same things and we were as different as night and day in our situations. Knowing that I wasn't alone. That they expressed the same things as I thought and felt. The connecting between us changed me. Helped me grow.

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• I work with one student particularly and she, she's a very timid person anyway. So looking at her from her point of view, maybe she has all of the extra disadvantages that come with being a woman. But there are also some very timid men here ....

I think they're just individuals. I just never seem to separate in my mind men and women. I know it's fashionable to do that, but I don't do that ....

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• Women are not always the same "woman." Some are coming into our programs from a long history of disadvantage, some are housewives from middle class or working class homes who have relatively few constraints. Some women are young, straight out of high school and getting ready for trades training or further education and some are women who have one career already. These are not all the same woman.

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• It just doesn't work well to use a southern feminist analysis in the north. The context, the history, is different enough that men's and women's relations cannot be interpreted the same—particularly in relation to the social structure.

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• A literacy worker recognizes her similarity with students—

"I needed to come here just as much as they did. And for the same reasons. The only difference was I was here for work. I was here because I was being paid. That's the only thing I had different from them. All the other things were very similar. I needed to be with other women. I needed to talk about things. I needed the time out—even though it was so difficult to get out—I needed that experience."

• While, in another community, a literacy student expresses her experience of difference —

"Because she didn't get the money she needed or wanted, she just got up and left. Said to hell with it. The thing is, we can't. And I think that's where it hurts. And that's when it really hit me, then, that it's a job to them. That's it, that's the bottom line. It's a job to them. That's as far as it goes. And I find in that respect, what do we do?"

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Women believe that there are some things they know about how women learn, and how they work alone and in groups. They also know what they have been told about women.

• I remember growing up, hearing this thing of "Get a bunch of women together and they're a bunch of cats." So, you go through life believing this for a long, long time—even though you personally have experiences with groups of women where that isn't true. And it takes you like 10 million experiences to realize that that's just a bunch of baloney. That that was somebody else's bias.

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• Because [women] have been nurturers and caregivers they are also very sensitive within a classroom environment. They're very co-operative, sensitive to other people's feelings, co-operative in terms of helping other people toward self esteem and feeling good about themselves .... I also find that women like to work together, they like to have fun together, they befriend each other. It becomes an emotionally-involving, emotionally-charged as well as intellectually-charged environment.

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• I think [women] are less passive. I think maybe they know more about how they learn. They comment more on what they've noticed about how they've learned. Whereas I get more often from the male students things like, "Well, you decide what we'll do. You're the teacher." The women students more often don't say that to me when I say "What do you want to do." Something open like that. They'll say "You know what really works for me ...." or "I had this book and it was really good" or "My tutor did this and I really liked it" or "Once we did this, let's do that again." They're much less passive. They're much more, they know more about what works for them.

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• [The men] just do academic stuff .... When they're on the computers upstairs, we're down here doing our classroom stuff which is based on discussion and projects. When they're down here, they're studying things outside of themselves. Like, we study things inside of ourselves and inside other women and they study geography. They did science experiments, mechanics. No discussion of self at all. It's like women are expected to be concerned about themselves. Men manipulate things.

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• When you get a group of women, it doesn't take very long before the socialization starts to happen. Whereas with a group of men, if you don't make it happen, it's not going to happen.

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• I know that from what I can see the women students that we have here are very happy to be here. They are happy with the way that [the women instructors] run things because they know that they are getting a fair shake. And they feel as though they can do something and progress.

And the men students who understand that, are good students. The male students who don't understand that, who have more of a typical male model, have a bit more of a time adjusting. Because they see women as different than what [the women] are trying to show us.

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• Women have such a capacity to be intimate. There's something very positive about being the caretakers and the nurturers of the world because it also provides us with the nurturing and caring nature. So we also have a lot of unseen and unsung benefits.

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• My own experience ... is that working across an ability range is easier. I can imagine myself taking 0–3 and 4–6 without any difficulty if it is all women .... My experience is that it's easier with women because of a natural tendency to be patient and to work with each other—their style, mostly. And, mostly, to be less directly demanding of a certain definable academic result. They have a bigger view often of what they're doing here.

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• [Women] like to come and hang out, shoot the shit .... They also like group. Group learning I'm finding women are enjoying much more than a tutor because they're willing to share ideas.

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• When we sit and do it by ourselves [it's not good enough] ... it's only one hour and we have to rush. Especially me. Somebody is standing behind me and I can't understand anything! I know they are waiting for his help. Everything just goes blank. And I just told him I go home and ask my husband to help me. It forces me to learn from my husband, not my teacher.

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• From having observed male/female groups, I tend to feel females really enjoy learning because of the social interaction that they manage with other women .... I've experienced it several different times .... When it first happened, I thought "Oh, this is a fluke. This is just a good group of women." But, there's many good groups of women.

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• She's got a way with people that she brings out—she gets them to say what they want to learn. She knows how to help them out in that area. I think that was the success—that the instructor, even though she knew what she was supposed to teach, but she didn't teach them what she knows. She taught them what they want to know .... That's why it was so successful. Because it wasn't up to the instructor to teach the stuff, it was up to the people taking the course to tell the instructor what they want to know. And she did it. And I admire her for it!

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• I think in order for a centre like this to work then it's got to be all encompassing because people don't live in a vacuum ....

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• There was all the stuff around child sexual abuse coming out ... it just consumed everyone and as a result we started talking about it. ... So we said, "Well, why don't we build it into part of a discussion group." ... It was just an incredible shift in terms of thinking about the issue and also a movement to become involved in different things, such as the coalition against pornography .... Also in the process of that four women identified themselves as having been victims of sexual abuse and the potential for that to move was just phenomenal.

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• We do have a lot of fun. I think that's really important. We build fun into the program. We build going out for lunch, having pot lucks, mental health days .... They enjoy coming here. If you don't enjoy what you're doing, then you're not going to get the cooperation.

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• What would you change?

• Have classes instead of going at your own pace by yourself • a program where you have more choices that don't depend on math • more career type counselling regarding courses • more classes at night • more choice of courses • games like volleyball organized • more friends my own age • to be able to live with my birth mother • money for transportation each day • I wish I hadn't slacked off when I was in school before. That I had gone back and finished.

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Women talk about the different reasons why they and others cannot come to literacy and upgrading programs. Usually women face more than one barrier.

• Sometimes we've seen that the school has been the straw that broke the camel's back. And I don't think it's intentional. But they just cannot cope with the pressures of the home environment as well as having homework and family problems.

I've seen that a couple of times where it's pushed a couple of them over the deep end .... And how many don't we know about?

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• How do you help—make it better—when so much is difficult—no money, no support, no daycare, the work is too hard, didn't get cheque on time, house broken into, car broke down ....

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• Things that stop women from coming to school: can't afford it, got a job, shifts, timetable doesn't fit, needs to come at night, no transportation/no buses, two small kids, no childcare or transportation, one had a babysitter quit, too tired after work and kids.

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• It was an interesting case of a single mum. She was working full time, and going to [40 miles from her home] twice a week to take two courses and then coming to this organization to get tutoring. She was totally stressed out.

We only met a couple of times but we felt sorry for her because she could not cope with what she was doing. She did drop one subject and I think perhaps she dropped both of them shortly after ....

She was stuck in a waitress job and she didn't want to be there. She felt that she could upgrade herself because she really wanted to do it but for all those reasons, she couldn't get through it all.

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• Well just generally, I think we need more day care centres ... and probably more help financially.

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• I have a neighbor and she's having the problems of babysitting and transportation. I told her I can give her a ride. So she says she's too scared to go back to school. Now she's moving away, I can't help her at all.

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• In the program that I'm working in most of the students work. Definitely one job, maybe two .... Domestic workers don't have a lot of control over their free time, which is an issue. And women who work in factories where they feel they can't turn down overtime. So there's like work situations that make it difficult.

And whatever the actual work situation, there's always demands of being at home. For example there was a woman coming to X who had two kids and a husband who was injured at work and he wasn't very supportive. He didn't disallow her from going, but he didn't make it any easier for her. She still had to do all the cooking and everything when she came home. Most of the time she brought the kids with her when she came. And having kids around is a bit difficult.

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• When those things happen, when the economic situation gets so bad, the economy gets so bad, if there is a partner there, a male partner, then oftentimes other things show their faces. Like, you often in economic crises see more violence .... So we can suspect there has been an increase in violence given the other kinds of information that we have. Plus, if you're worried about food, you aren't coming to any programs.

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• I don't want to sit in a classroom six or seven hours a day. I have to hit food banks. I have to sit and read and wait for my social worker.

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• My mum, she wanted to come to school. She took the assessment test and she did really well. But she works from 4 to 12 so it's hard for her to get any sleep and go to school at the same time.

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Many women feel the way in which we have set up our social systems work against us. They stop us from moving forward and keep us entrenched in poverty.

• Poverty seems to be the most hindering. It just kind of eats people up and drags them down.

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• A lot of the women have trouble with Children's Aid, having their children taken away .... That's all very complicated, it has a lot of issues in it ....

There's one woman recently who's gone through that and she's really gone out of the program. Actually, when you think about it, it has really eliminated literacy for her because she's just personally trying to deal with what's happened to her and her tutor's there to tell her "I'll get back to you whenever you want," but she doesn't expect anything to happen because everything is just total chaos ....

But it's like a lot of things. I think it's so emotionally draining, it doesn't leave much room for learning.

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• Some won't come in for three or four days and you know they're worried about getting food on the table, or this, that, and the other thing. They don't want to come to a program, sit down and read and write.

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• [Social services] say their mandate is not education, that's the standard line. They're not in the business of providing for people to go to educational facilities. That's a crying shame. They'e keeping people on their payroll for want of a few extra dollars every week to educate them, upgrade them.

The people that come into our classes, and I'm sure all the other programs around, do not want to be on social services. They want to be able to get out and do something for themselves. **I think it's very very hard to not feed your kids while you're going to school.** Obviously the kids are the priority.

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• In social services and housing, they will only fund one partner at a time. We've actually had instances here a young fellow and a woman have met and either started living together or gotten married and one of them had to quit school .... In the three cases that I know of, it's been the woman that's quit and stayed home because of the cost.

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• We've never seen it like that before. We decided it was time for some more community visits. We better go out and find out why people aren't coming .... One of the women came back one time and she just sat and cried. She said "I've never seen it. People are hungry. You get to the door and you could tell. It's written all over their faces. It was just awful." That has not gone away. That has not changed.

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• The big problem is social assistance recipients who come in and have child care and transportation and drugs paid for. They get out to minimum wage in an entry level job where none of that's available. There's no incentive. Other than a guaranteed annual income, I don't know what the answer is.

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• [The economic] situation hasn't changed and as a result the clientele who are coming to our program now has changed because it affects women the hardest. So we're getting more young men now who have a reason to believe that if they are to learn to read and write and upgrade their skills, they would have better access to some kind of employment.

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Like most women who have to leave their homes to do what they want or need to do, women involved in literacy have difficulty finding good, affordable childcare.

• A lot of men in town don't babysit .... And even those who do babysit, if the kid starts to cry, think nothing of bringing the kid over to the woman in the middle of a course, an interview, a meeting, anything. And the trouble with a community this size is you can't hide. So, if they want to track you down, they track you down.

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• It was very difficult for me [to teach the program]. My husband traveled almost 75 per cent of the time last year. And to find a babysitter that would show up on time, that could handle putting the three kids to bed. I found it very hard to get out the door. I was impacted probably more than everybody .... Even though I have extended family here it was very hard.

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• They have to rely on their friends or family to keep their children every day while they are in class. And it's all right for a while. OK, Grandma will do it. But she's getting old. She's not going to do it every day.

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• When we started the tutor program, one of the reasons why we didn't get very much response is that they can't go out and just—or don't have time to just—sit and be taught. Because they don't have babysitters or they're too busy doing things. Or they're not interested .... Oh, the babysitters—I have babysitter problems all year. When they change so many times it's hard on the children and the mother.

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• We're in a situation where we do have funding for childcare, but that's not necessarily the issue. We don't always have a person to always do the childcare and we're always caught in the thing—what is the best way to do this?

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• A lot of the women wait until they know that they've got their kids looked after, before they even make any contact with the organization. So, if they finally find out in August that things are going OK—I can go back to school—they come in and they're totally frustrated because we say "Oh, you have to take an assessment test, you can't take one until after classes start, and most of the classes are full." ... The unfortunate thing is that you have to plan ahead even if it is for two courses or even one.

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• We don't yet have daycare. God knows if we're going to get it. Three of my students won't be back in the fall—they're having babies. When they come back it will depend on daycare, for infants. And there's a very, very strong tendency to stay home with an infant which I can understand. More so than with an older child. And yet many of the young women get started with us, they're with us one term or two terms and then they're off for a year or two. It feels like you lose.

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• The husband is not working and he will not look after the kids. It's not his job.

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• And I think while daycare is an issue across the board, not just for people who don't have money, obviously it's more of a problem for them because they can't pay anybody. There is no money for special services ... from any of the funding services. Yet they want women to get off welfare.

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When women start to talk about some of the things that make it hard to get to programs, very often the first comments focus on responsibilities in the home, with their families.

• [Housework] all has to wait until I get home. It's one rush-around .... It's just waiting for me.

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• I think ladies have more responsibility than guys do. There's times when I drifted off because I know I left something undone. And there were days I couldn't concentrate because I knew there was something I didn't do at home or someplace else.

To try to go to school and have the responsibility of our home—you can't really concentrate because we have more responsibility than a guy does. He can come and go and he doesn't have to look after the kids and cooking and cleaning and things that we have to do. I think that what we're kind of lacking is we don't give enough time for ourself and we're not really thinking of us instead of a lot of other things.

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• I don't do my housework the same, I do it at night and go to bed late. I don't see my mother-in-law like I used to. I would do her housework on the weekends. Now I can't do it.

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• Some men have to take daycare and childcare into consideration, but certainly nowhere near the percentage of the women. And they're faced with the same financial difficulties in a lot of cases. But I think the men just don't have as many responsibilities at home as the women do.

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• I want to come to school and I have to look after two families, my parents, my sister, sometimes my in-laws too. I decide I am coming to school, but it's very hard. I wish somebody was there to help me, but nobody is there to help me. My husband, he just goes to work. He helps me, but ....

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• I had to tell my Dad I had to come back to school ... to quit being his partner in the car business and also had to give up doing most of the cleaning in the house, gardening and grasscutting and cleaning up. Also keeping the house tidy for mum. She works during the day. And also making suppers.

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• If they do happen to believe that they do want to go to this course and do want to leave the family for two evenings or a weekend or whatever, people don't agree with them. So the values are imposed on them within their culture, just like all of us, I guess. It's really hard to be strong enough to end up with what you want.

And often, the kind of women that we get involved with in tutoring anyways ... haven't been successful in school and so they don't have enough confidence to sort of demand it. So I'm sure that some of the people who don't turn up for tutoring or for appointments—I know that they probably have a myriad of reasons .... The big one is the family, the husbands.

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• Some of the men have called the school and said "What are you teaching my wife?" These are all married women who have raised their children and want to get back in the workforce ....

The women would go home and, if they didn't feel like cooking supper, they wouldn't say "Get it yourself." But they would say, "I don't really feel like cooking it right now...." So it was assertive, it wasn't aggressive.

They were used to being passive because they were in the home, took care of the children, took care of the husband, took care of the house and that was their role. They had seen no role for the husband doing any of that work. The women's day was from seven in the morning until eleven at night ....

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Often women realize that for many women the overwhelming responsibilities at home indicate that the real problem may be a lack of support from other family members.

• It's hard for me to go back to school. My boyfriend disagrees with me coming back. He just wants me to give up all the time. And I want to go! That kind of tension ....

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• We had another one. Her husband didn't want her to be here. "What are you doing down there. You should be home." That little thing she's doing for herself and she felt great about being here. Just being out of the house if for no other reason ....

She left the program and I would say it was troubles home. I mean what's the point? You stay at home. There's so much fighting about it, she decided it wasn't worth the effort .... You start to feel like you're pulling her one way and her family's pulling her another way.

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• I think the people who need our help the most are the ones that aren't taken seriously. Not necessarily not supported, but they're not taken seriously. Because your family can sort of support you, but they don't show it because they think it's not important.

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• I keep figuring, well, I'm going to change. I'm not going to let them take over. I was going to complete my upgrading and I kept trying to tell myself that. I guess I shouldn't have kept telling myself that because they sort of still got to me. Jealousy and things like that kept getting in my way and every time I went home, I had to fight them. And it got to the point that I didn't want to go home, cause I knew once I got home I'd have to argue. So I just said OK—went out—got drunk for a week. And then it was too late. I didn't come back after that.

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• So it's usually somebody dumping on them [that stops women from coming]. It's usually men.

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• One woman talked about the difference between her husband who beat her when she couldn't do things he asked, and left her when he discovered she couldn't read, and her boyfriend who respects her for going back and trying to learn, and also helps her with immediate needs. He understands she can't read, but he doesn't think she is stupid.

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• The school's OK. It's my home life that's got to change. I've got to get rid of my child and my husband first! This school is OK—interesting.

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• H's husband was having a struggle with H. Watching her independence. • That's right. He wouldn't peel a potato. • He was having a hard time. • I was peeling vegetables before I went to work in the morning. Putting on supper when I went home. I remember one day I got mad, told him he had to do the goddam wash alone. [Her daughter] said, "Mama, I wish you would have told me." Her socks were all over the place. Her clothes were stiff with detergent. [lots of laughter]

• He was raised up in a family where they weren't allowed to touch—the right person to do the right thing .... • And they're getting there. Like last Sunday I felt like I was in the way ....

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Women are clear that this lack of support is not only passive resistance. Many, many women face violence from men if they dare to go back to school.

• I am sitting here thinking of some of the people that have stopped coming. Very often it's husbands .... Beat them up. Tell them that they can't go. Don't want them to be any more than what they are .... The wife isn't waiting on them hand and foot because she isn't there for two to four hours in the day.

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• I think violence in the home causes so many things. I think it causes a lack of self-worth, a lack of self-esteem, a lack of confidence. If you're being told you're stupid or worthless for so many years than you start to believe it. I really believe that if somebody says something often enough they start to believe it. I think every time they're abused, it's "How can I go back to school. I'm stupid. How can I make that effort to get out there, that first step to get out there."

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• I'd like to see a women's group meeting—but I don't know how to get it going—about violence and sexual abuse against women. A support group ....

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• Low education does help keep you where you are. That's why men become so threatened when you start to finish your program and you might look at some kind of training. You may not be so dependent.

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• Often when women start back to school that's when their husbands start to beat them, or begin again, or it gets worse, or whatever. And—from talking to women who work in transition houses—when women come to a transition house then they start getting their lives together. One of the things that they do is go back to school. And often they go back to school and they go back to their husband. [The two things] get really closely linked .... And so it's an issue that needs to get dealt with .... That's one of the things where having all-women classes would be better.

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• Personally, I would like someone who deals with women's problems like violence in the home. I mean, women come in here with no self-esteem. Now, we can pretty much work with that .... But we don't know how to deal with violence in the home. I mean, they're not going to leave the home anyway. But to be able to tell them how they might deal with it if they are home ....

How to deal even with large families who are probably always bugging her because one or the other's always needing attention. The baby's always crying or she's having a hard time with the husband. Probably not violence on the part of beating, but nagging, or not there to help, or whatever. To be able to talk to and tell them, "This is maybe what you could do," or whatever.

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• This hasn't been brought up in the last three days and it's been on my mind because I have a lot of friends who have this problem. That there should be an assault counsellor because a lot of women have problems with that—sexual assault and other assault. There should be a counsellor like that. If you miss a day at school because of problems like that, problems at home like that, you can catch up because in some cases you can't.

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• This society has violated women on every level. Women are violated sexually, physically and economically and the violence that is associated with those three major areas for women, identify very special needs for women and there needs to be a society that will recognize that and allow things to fall in place. Never mind putting things in place. Let us put things in place, but don't block us from doing it.

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• When a woman becomes involved in a literacy program, when she's becoming more independent, the man is losing his grip and he's becoming more violent and more aggressive and attempting more control ....

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Despite the many barriers to their participation, women have no difficulty talking about why they want to take part in literacy and upgrading programs.

• She really wants to do training so she can get out of factory work. But it's not possible for her to do training because the majority of the apprenticeship programs pay $5 an hour. She can't afford to be paid $5 an hour to support two kids and a partner. And at one point she was also talking about doing secretarial training and so that led to a discussion in our group that actually you would be better paid if you stayed in the factory work.

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• Some of the elders say they are all dying off and they would like to pass things to us, but because we are doing so many things today, we don't take them as well as the young people used to and the only way that they're going to preserve their culture and language is if we write them down and keep them for their children and their children's children. That's what an elder told me and I think that's very true .... A lot of the young people, they read in English.

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• We have wives that come in here. They come in here to get away from their husbands. One woman came in here and her husband decided that he was going to come in here the same afternoon. And she called us and changed hers to another evening.

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• I hated being helpless. Helplessness is my number one enemy. There is nothing worse than feeling helpless in a situation when you can't help it. And I hated that so much. I was determined to get myself out of there and I had a good family to help me.

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• When a husband and wife team come, it's very important for us to keep control of that. Because a lot of women see this as a sanctuary. And a lot of the women come here and they sit down and they can have a chit and chat and, even if they get the crap beaten out of them when they go home, this is theirs. So, we don't have a lot of men. I mean, we have to allow them in, but ....

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• It's a reason to come out of the house ... East Indian ladies, we aren't allowed, we don't want, to go out to drink or go to dances or anything like that. The only thing for us is coming to school. The only way we can come out. That's our out-going—going wherever you go [on class trips].

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• One girl took the first job she'd ever had in her life. It was a cashier at the grocery store. But I think that took a certain amount of hauling yourself up out of a rut and saying I'm going to do this, earn a wage. Especially when her husband didn't work. It was putting herself in a vulnerable position. A threatening position. So it must have taken something inside of herself to do that. And she obviously took a lot of joy out of doing that, out of being in that job.

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• Women stay in school longer, have higher educational levels, higher skill levels, more flexible in their job aspirations, less stereotyped, less narrow in their perceptions of self—and generally have fundamental organizational skills because they do care for the family and they have to balance their children and everything else. So if you go around town and you look in the administration of the community, you'll find that it's dominated by women. Highly skilled women.

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Some women indicate that they are very uncomfortable with the idea of women-only programs. It doesn't seem "natural" for women to talk together or work on their own.

• We thought the women should know what their rights were in terms of custody, in terms of any type of family law .... We do things like that. We focus on women but we invite the men to be a part of it as well .... And that can certainly make for a lively discussion. Because some men are so set in their ways that we thought that this needs to be talked about and we need to talk about why .... We thought it was quite therapeutic in one way for them to stay—their minds were obviously changing as they heard all the things that were going on and it was quite good. But I don't know that we actually start by going into the program saying this needs to be addressed for women. I think we do it, but I think it's not conscious ....

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• I certainly think that at certain levels there should be co-education because that is how people work together and how do you get around the whole sexual thing. It's another level of education as well. I certainly don't think that women should always be grouped unto themselves and men should always be grouped unto themselves. But I do think that if people psychologically deal with some of the things they have to deal with before they take on the academics and the impartiality of sex .... I think that a lot of our sexual problem is that psychologically that hasn't been worked out first amidst like-mindedness.

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• I think in many ways we don't separate out a women's course from the men, because we think whatever happens with women, it will affect men. I think we need to let the men realize that women have a place, that they have a focus, that there are things that are important to them. And I think just to say to the women, "This is for you and you only," and to say to the men, "You don't need to know about that," well ....

We've gone through things in science like the reproductive cycle. We thought that men should know as much about the women's reproductive cycle as women should. Now, if some are interested in something that nobody else is, that is particular to women, then a group of women are quite welcome to work on it. We don't force anything onto people. But if we feel it is pertinent to how a man will see himself in society or how a man will see himself in terms of the law, then we think that they should know about it.

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• Part of my problem is I'm very tender about [the issue of women-only classes]. It's not a battle I'm going to take on because I don't have the personal strength to take what will be said and I don't have the personal strength to make the explanation over and over and over and over and over and over and over and over. That's one that I really have trouble being "light" about. And that's absolutely mandatory .... Making jokes at the same time that you make the point .... I'd be very surprised to hear that this is anything that this organization would even be allowed to consider. It's a decision that would be made so many levels above us.

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• I should say on the record that I think we do not exclude the men. We get jokes about that and I think that some of the males out there in the community aren't sure what the situation is here .... Their perception of looking at it on paper would have been that it would have been a man-hating organization. But those vibes just aren't there. It's really open. We're not insular at all. We don't bite.

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• There aren't too many men that find it easy to work in this kind of [woman-positive] environment.

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As others speak, they talk about the reasons they, or other women want to take part in woman-positive, women-only programs, groups or activities.

• Well, there's something I would like to say, but I think that it's way off. [Go for it.] Men have always had the power. And I guess, I guess, it's, well, for me, it's harder [to be in a group with men] because I'm more open. I think girls are more open than boys and get hurt more. And like, your friends and all, they get closed up, to a point, and then everybody just sticks to themselves and you can't really get in touch. Like you can't be friends with anybody because they're shut off to a point. [Kind of like protection.] Hmmhmm.

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• Women in a group tend to be more supportive of each other than men in a group. Men tend to be more distant even towards men. And you don't get that in a women's group and so maybe that's why a women's group seems to go further.

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• I think when they're entering, it is good for women to get together .... They get an opportunity to speak from their heart with like-minded others and sometimes speaking from the heart means resentment against men and ... the cares of the childrearing. The commonality of a shared experience really does help women very much into feeling like "This is a normal process and this is normality." Whereas I think when you get into a male/female group, it's not the same commonality so you find subjects aren't quite as intimate.

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• It's not always easy for women to be in classroom with men here. There are still roles and stereotypes of roles. There seemed to be ... women seemed to come together and stay together during coffee breaks. They didn't seem .... The men went outside and had cigarettes. Sometimes the women did. But most of the time they were in separate groups. So it seemed to indicate to us that they would like a separate group.

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• There was a woman who at first didn't say a word to anyone in the group. And then it got to well, how do you feel your breasts for lumps. If you go to a doctor they give you a pamphlet, how to, but that doesn't tell you how to do it. You want a little tape recorder to tell you how to do it. Before you know where it is, she's absolute standing up, talking and going, well I have that, and the doctor told me this. Because she had already had it. Without knowing, without even thinking, she's standing demonstrating, teaching me, how to feel my lumps!

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• The conversations we used to have in the women's group would never ever come up around men. No way. It's not the sort of thing you talk about.

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• What happened was that the people would get together to discuss something and obviously [staff] would look into that. But when we met again the following week, perhaps you might be sitting having a cigarette and a coffee, and people would start to talk and would bring the conversation into the room about boyfriends, relationships, who we trust and who we don't. It was a little bit of everything.

I think that was the fun part. It wasn't just about sex or children, it was what we wanted, how we felt, angry, frustrated, whatever .... And I think it sort of, whatever you started talking about outside, you sort of bring it in. So whatever you talked about the week before, it sort of really never got followed up. What I felt in my mind, whatever you discussed in that day, you either have to close it or find the information out there or—because by the time you come back next week it's a different topic.

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• I would be scared to talk [if men in the same group]. I don't know why That's all. It's hard for me .... I'm shy from ladies too, not only from men.

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Throughout the research process, women continued to talk about the positive experiences they have had or the impact woman-positive activities had on their program.

[How would this meeting be different if we had men in it?]

• I think it would be extremely different! I think that a lot of us would shut up! I don't think we would be as open as we are in talking about the things we've been talking about .... Because they're men.

• Maybe because you start to feel like they might not understand. It's like sometimes you're talking about certain things you just don't want to talk to men about. Because sometimes women just like to talk among themselves. I'm sure men are the same way. Because they feel sort of self conscious too in opening up there problems. They talk to other guys all the time. Or to their friends.

• Well usually when you're in a group discussion women are more apt to be more open .... I think it's just because the way you feel, you feel a bit more uptight maybe .... You talk about how they're going to react .... I feel a lot better in all-women groups just because you think well, she understands how I feel about it, just because she is a woman. Because she's got the same problems maybe. Just even though she's a different kind of person. You think, she knows how you feel.It's just easier talking. You feel more comfortable because they're the same as you.

• I like it better in a mixed group, really .... Sometimes these men, it's good for them to know our problems. It's nice to be able to understand men, to tell them how you feel. Sometimes I think there's not enough communication between people. They do have all the same needs and wants. They do have all the same problems really.

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• I think to some extent there is a lot of discussion around [differences men and women] here among the staff. And I've wondered whether it came from the fact that a women's group was run here or maybe it always was. But I also heard [women students] remembering things that came from the women's group. Or understandings that happened. Like I think that the whole thing around trying to get a childcare fund really came or gelled from the women's group. I mean it may have been talked and thought about before but I think that there, that there were actions actually taken about it. And I really feel like that women's group affected how we planned [another group]. I feel that. I feel that people hark back to it.

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• Once [immigrant women re-entry programs] get going they just have a wonderful time and they really just make all kinds of progress. Just incredible. And they're so happy and they're so together. And I think part of it is because it happens to be a group of women that relate really well together. Better than a group of men, I would say, better than a co-ed group.

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• The women's program changed the program and me and everybody here on how we work with women. [Because?] Because we talked about it. And we were forced to look at things that we didn't have to look at, in order to make it accessible to women.

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• We had a group [of Native students] who had come through from literacy to grade ten, and then through advanced level, all together as a group. What happened was there was this chemistry that took place within that group: They were very articulate, they were very clearly directed .... And what they did is they made changes in the whole college because they said these are the problems that we are facing as a specific group .... So I see that when we get a group that's going to be all-women that we're going to have that same kind of impact.

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Some women shared longer stories about their experience with what actually happens when a women-only activity or program is put into place. There are no easy answers!

• Two things happened. Number one, [the women-only class] turned into a consciousness-raising group, a really tight little group of women, who gave each other support about all kinds of stuff. And they did a whole lot of literacy work around that. It worked beautifully in terms of them using reading and writing skills to tackle their problems, as well as doing some straight academic work ....

So they took students at a certain range of ability and took the women out. So what they were left with were the men. And most of the men turned out to be more or less young boys. And nobody wanted to teach that group. They were a pretty depressing bunch and very difficult to teach ....

So the next term it came up and we were going to do this again and the woman who had taught the all-women's group was too frightened. Basically she said "I don't think that what we were doing there could be called literacy work." ... She was quite terrified at having the group take over ....

Those women four years later still either knew each other, or asked about each other whenever they saw any of us connected with that department ....

We never had it again .... She was a very strong voice. She was the one that had had the direct experience and she could testify that it wasn't really a useful class in terms of their literacy instruction. And because we said, very clearly, that no one wanted to teach what was left—the men—which was the boys mostly ....

They weren't as motivated, they didn't have the social skills .... So the tone dropped .... The women carry on the social interaction so the men are drawn into it. And they take care to include them and they watch out for anybody who's not being taken care of ....

One man said that he could imagine taking it on, but you'd have to develop this whole program, this whole curriculum you'd have to take that on as separate from teaching them literacy. I mean, do you want to become a socializing teacher. I mean most of us are in it because we like having something as tangible as literacy to help people acquire. ... When you're a literacy instructor you get to do all that [personal and community development] by giving them this tool. It's a real treat compared to going in and saying "Can I be of any help?" ....

[Researcher: What the men would have been doing for the men is going out there, and getting curriculum together and making the men better men in the same way that women for years have tried to make the women more effective women, more functioning women.] That's true .... I have never yet, in 14 years now, taught a class in which I haven't spent a lot of time digging out more material and searching for more pieces that would allow those women to become stronger. That's because women are excluded in print just as they are excluded in the rest of the media. They are excluded in our culture. So I have this job to do. But men are in print.

[Researcher: But they're not in nurturing each other, they're not in taking care of each other.] So of course that's what men should be doing. [Researcher: Except that the men say, I don't want to do this, it's too much work, put the women back in and just let the women do it.] That's very interesting, yeah.

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One story—partial as are all the stories here—real as are all the stories here—is potentially very different from other versions that might be told—and it's still the truth.

• There was always a certain amount of shock value [in women's stories], because the things were shocking and there was never any kind of buffer for dealing with it in a more compassionate way or for the staff person to actually integrate it or anything like that. So there are lines of information coming from within the staff, to women staff. But I think once the women's group was struck and meeting regularly every week, the stories started being told to each other and that was far more important because the women had very similar experiences.

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• [We] tried to be in an environment with them where anything could be said, no matter how shocking, no matter how scary or how tearful it would be. Because those stories built one on top of each other and one of the women with [staff] encouragement decided she wanted to write her story. And it in a way had aspects of each of those women's lives.

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• And [two women staff] always did it together because we never knew what would come up. We needed to be there for each other. We needed to talk after. We needed to call in people to help, especially when it came to questions of abuse .... We just needed to get it clear what our role was and that we weren't counsellors but that we could hear.

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• The rest of the staff felt that we were draining the organization. So, we had a kind of feminist belief but it turned out to be not very flexible, not a very flexible belief. We believed that this group could stay within its limits and we couldn't because we never knew what was going to happen. We never knew what was going to be said. And the emotional impact on the other women and on us was something that we couldn't anticipate. So, we didn't get enough support from the rest of the collective. We kept asking and we kept bitching and eventually we did. But it took a while. [What kind of support were you looking for?] The time that it was taking. They were wondering why two of us needed to be in the group every week. Why couldn't it be just one person, spelling the other person off kind of thing.

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• It sort of pushed me more in the direction I was going in. To be a witness for people. To be a person who could help them articulate things. To give them freedom to do that. And any practical way to help them take that information further .... I wanted to be part of a network of women telling stories.

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• Did we have a right to put a group of women together and then disband that group again? Which is what we did. We had funding to hold a group together for a year and we had no funding after that. And we didn't make a commitment to go after that. And that was the ethical question. [Why didn't you go after the funding.] I don't know. I think that as a whole, as an overall, we were lacking direction from an organizational point of view. The staff was not saying strongly enough that this mattered. We didn't know enough then.

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• I think we do say that having done the women's group, and having discovered certain things, we now let those things change the organization and make it different. And that is true, I guess. But, it could not be true at the same time. And who's there to see if it's true or not?

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• Here we are in the middle [of the program]. We create this safe little forum for a certain group of women. And then we don't make that, we don't sort of take down the walls and make it a bigger place. It's like we kept it all secret. Or it became such a lot of busy work ... that there just wasn't a lot of space for participation .... If we did it again, it would be better.

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When women begin to participate in woman-positive activities within their programs, they talk of having to face the tensions between theory and practice.

• We had one student that we asked to leave because of his attitude towards women. It was quite offensive. And he seemed to be somewhat of a leader and a mouthy person in the group. And we thought this is not good. We don't want women who come into the program to feel this is the class attitude. We recommended another program to him ....

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• Part of the reason why you don't get many literacy programs for women is that this is "community" and so it changes the face of things. Also, [in "community"] there is not a clear understanding or recognition of the needs of women.

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• I think women staff, women working in literacy programs, front-line deliverers, would probably have as much to say .... How do their issues get sorted? And where do they go? Students can come to you. Where does the staff go? There is no forum. We don't make it a priority .... You don't even want to recognize that it is not a priority at your workplace. And you know that it isn't. And where do you go to have it addressed?

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• It just so happened that women gravitated [to the program]. It wasn't designed just as a women's program, although clearly, in the hearts of some of the people there, it might have been just as interesting, perhaps more interesting, if it had just stuck with women. But, then it wouldn't have become a community program.

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• Those of us who would deal with the minute-to-minuteness of [women-only classes] are the most divided on it. And those of us who would deal with the minute-to-minuteness of it are also the most afraid of the backlash because bureaucrats and support staff are more allowed to kind of not have to take a position but to seem to be supporting and working out. But if you say you are going to teach an all-women class then that implies you have taken a position and if you say you don't want to teach it, that implies your position, and if you don't get to teach it, you've got to come to terms with what you do get to teach ....

• It's the old business of when you take the women away, what's left is the men.

• And in fact if you take away a core group of women, you're probably leaving a small number of women with a large number of men. And what does that mean—what are the implications of leaving the women behind who may partly not be in that women-only class because they're too scared to be in that class? And so you've taken the most scared women and left them with the large number of men.

• Which is part of how the institution is patriarchal. It's the nature of the institution that's a problem. If all of the classes were as woman-friendly as they are man-friendly, it wouldn't matter who got left behind. But they aren't. That proves that they aren't. What would you care who was left behind if all of the classes were as equally woman-friendly?

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• The staff all kind of had a discussion about [possible sexual assault incident]. And we realized that he was preventing her, and then subsequent women—I mean we were trying to be learner-centred in giving this guy literacy, but felt that he was a barrier to women in the program. And see, he was really smart. It was really hard to pin him down between his rights as an individual and his—because we're not detectives and we're not lawyers—his rights as an individual and his freedom. Because we say literacy is a right—his right to have literacy. But we always would go in favour of the women, saying that because there had been other barriers in people's lives, this was one more barrier. I mean you get in and then you get harassed.

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When women organize woman-positive activities, they are confronted with the question: What about the men? Some women suggest the men need to look for the answers.

• What does it **mean** "What about the men?" What's the problem? Why don't the men just meet on their own when the women meet?

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• I mean there are always going to be a few males that are going to be hard line on the place of a woman .... It is going to take a long time for them to get over that. If they **ever** get over that .... It's going to take time. So I guess the danger maybe is in pushing too hard. There might be some sort of a kickback or whiplash that happens, that might tend to have some sort of reversal. People might tend to back off or something. I don't know. I haven't seen it here.

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• You could get rid of all the men—all of us.

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• Why should they change? There's no reason to change as long as you control the balance of power. There are some men who are feminist, who will say, " Yes, there is an imbalance here and an injustice and let's correct it." And, "Yes, I will give up some of my power in order that you may have some more power and balance things out." But for the most part, men aren't going to.

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• There has been a men's forum at [literacy conference]. And that doesn't appeal to me at all. I went to a men's forum [in another organization] and I couldn't wait to get out of the meeting. In some ways I don't actually know what men's issues are. I'm not in touch with them. And men generally don't talk about them anyway unless they're kind of in bitchy terms, just shooting the shit or complaining. I've learned more from just kind of being on the outside of a women's group here. And I have no idea how a men's group could make that useful.

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• What happens to those men who don't fit into the way things are going .... They don't agree with the way we are treating women [positively]. What happens to them? Do they drop out? Do they cause trouble in the classroom .... What do we do for them?

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• I think [looking after the men], that's an extension of the mothering role that I refuse to take. The men can look after themselves. When they're ready, they will. I don't feel like I need to go out and take care of them and tell them "You really should come and discuss your inside feelings." No. I'm not going to mother a male adult. Or at least, whenever possible I will not do it. So I feel really strongly that that's bullshit!

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• The subtext to those conversations is women need a women-only support group because they need a safe space. Men don't support each other. So a men-only support group is a contradiction. Women support men. So a mixed group is a men's support group.

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• Even if at a sort of local level of human one-to-one relationships, it may have some impact about the general oppression of class, the general oppression of racism, how men and women are linked .... That kind of issue. If men were to raise within men staff, men students and men teachers, with some direction, I think that would be a very great outcome .... It isn't a woman's issue. It's not a woman's issue.

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• You know, for all the hardship and everything, I'm not worried about the women. They'll do well. They'll find a way as they always have. They have the [inner] resources. They have the organizations. That's not true for the men, certainly not true for a large proportion of men here. I really despair over the men in this community. I think the crisis is for the men. I know that is not very apropos to talk about ....

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Some women talked about what happens when they start to talk with other women about their lives. For many of us, this process of consciousness can be painful.

• I guess, probably, where it sort of just filters down into probably a lot of small things, or not small things, but things that are subtle. Then you realize that you've thought about them .... It's funny. You look at it and then you start to see all these little layers underneath. It's really strange.

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• Thank god that we can't go on all day thinking in these terms. That we just get on with making lunch. Because I just feel paralyzed with what we're talking about. The intensity of fear, rage, all that stuff. I couldn't live with feeling this every minute of my day. I wouldn't function.

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• I think that pretty well most of the women there would call themselves feminist at this point. But, when it all started, they weren't looking in that direction. They were just women who wanted to get together. But you can't get a group of women together who don't begin to realize that there's real common grounds here. The common grounds have to do with the fact that **we're** women, **they're** men.

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• How do they get to the space where they feel safe enough to even think about it as an option? I mean how many women really think that they have the right to go off and meet on their own for their own good?

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• In one situation, as women spoke together during the research, they came to see their similarities. "I'm just like her. That's all." This is a phrase said several times of women who spoke before and who are also significantly "different" in terms of such things as age, economic class, ethnicity.

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• There are not too many places we can go from [a discussion of the problems]. And I think going back and forth into discussion—from local to global—from global to local—action and reflection is key. But how do you do that without being really despondent. Because there are no mechanisms. State mechanisms are completely useless, human rights ....

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• It seems that the more conscious we become of ourselves as women, the more we get a heightened sense of how vulnerable we all are as women. And the more everyone becomes conscious of us as women, the more vulnerable we become .... We feel increasingly vulnerable because we are concentrating on ourselves as women and others were talking about us as women, and that becomes quite—I don't know what the word would be, we don't have a word—"Nerviness"—like a heightened awareness that has a bit of fear in it and that talks about violence that's out there. As soon as you're singled out as a "woman," there's the spectre of violence.

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• The problem of inside and outside—people are kind of incestuously bound inside and ... [issues of sexism] cannot be dealt with in isolation .... It all comes to the surface. Do I want to know that? Do I want to know how X thinks of me in terms of me, in terms of my life. It is very scary. It is so much easier to do it outside because then you are one person, and the others, the social relations, are not intertwined. So it is relatively safe.

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Women in one program talked around a table together about what they see happening in their community—with other women and with themselves—as change begins to happen.

• They think of themselves in roles—the man's role and the woman's role—they don't know how to get out of that role.
• Because I was reared up at the time it was and boys were boys and girls were girls and this was what girls did and this is what boys did.
• But I think that's the way people see themselves: This is my life and this is what I'm here for ....
• But I don't think **we** do. Well, I certainly don't. I can't speak for anyone else around the table. But I certainly don't. And my daughter doesn't ....
• This is how they think: This is my life work. Look after the house, look after the man and that's it. But they're not of much other use. That's how they think of themselves. And this is what causes a lot of women to have such low self-esteem. They don't think they're important. We found that out through coming through this program. It took a while to really see the writing: That I am important. And what I do is important and what I say is important ....
• I married back in the 50s. It was still the standards. You stay home and you look after hubby. And I did for seventeen years ....
• I really feel that I got stuck in this role and don't know how to get out of it.
• I believed it all 'til I came over here. Supposed to be a mother, a good wife ...
• It's not easy letting go of it. Especially when you leave it so late in life ....
• I always believed that women were the same as men. But you get into a rut and you can't get out and the opportunity don't arise, it will stay until you die. What can you do about it? I always believed since I was thirteen or fourteen that I was just as good as any man walking around .... I thought I could do any job a man could do.

But, I just fell into a hole with the children. Waiting for my husband to pass me a five dollar bill to go to bingo if I was lucky and if he decided to stay home with the children, right? And I always thought he never **had** to stay there and that was it.

Until you get on your own and you got money, you're depending on him and that's it. Even the women who do know it. If they don't have a chance to get out of it they'll stay there ....
• I'm more my own woman than I ever was ...
• I still feel the same thing, but now it feels more important, that myself is more important than anything .... It's only now I know what I really want to do. Without violence ....
• This is it. If you don't see other women living differently then how would you know ....
• [So how did you change?] I think it was from seeing other people, especially from seeing A, she was my influence ....
• She was my influence too. She sort of lives an independent life ....
• And not just A, there's a lot of women living .... there's M too ....
• I'm still struggling with it ....

Women literacy workers often talk about the tensions they feel in the fine lines between their roles as teacher, counsellor, facilitator. How can they work responsibly?

• And I think with my literacy students that the role that I take on with them in the class—which is confidence building, nurturing, encouraging, helping, all of those things—are things that they see women doing for them. And especially the male students are willing to take it from a woman .... It's something that they expect from a woman.

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• [We need] some kind of assistance that can help the group to be able to move through some of [the issues] without wearing us out. Because so many times we all felt as though—either we're tutors here or we're counsellors. And more and more we felt as though we were counsellors. And more and more we felt inadequate in that job. We were OK with the tutoring .... But the counselling was really very fearful. Now that may be nothing more than the society that we live in that professionalizes everything, including women's experience. But it may be more than that.

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• Very often the students see us as counsellors. We have to be able to draw the line. I cannot counsel a person who has been sexually abused. I cannot counsel a person who has been physically abused. I cannot counsel a person who has been in trouble with the law. I will talk to them. They can vent any emotion. They can just cry, they can talk for an hour. I'm here. What I will do is I have a list of service agencies. I'll say, look, these people will help you. I can't—in many ways I'm not allowed. If you look at it, I could get in very serious trouble if I counsel somebody that I thought was good advice and it turned out to be really horrible. I won't set myself up to do that. Not so much for my own protection but for the protection of the student. I mean I have to protect my job, of course, but I have to think "I don't really know about this." I have to always keep that in the back of my head. "I don't know about this."

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• I have lots of qualms about mixing the role of teacher and therapist ... [with] the power relation between students and teachers that's already there, being given more power or taking more power than I already have is something I would steer away from .... It's a very difficult relationship for me to be in. I don't have very much experience with having a therapist myself and I do have a negative view from lots of stories from women.

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• When [teachers] ask a student to write and a student writes something that says my husband beat me up last night—the onus then immediately comes on that faculty. What does that teacher do—say, well, there's two grammatical and three spelling errors here? So I know the tremendous struggle that teachers are always going through.

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• If I were 27 instead of 47—I'd probably be much more inclined to drop in with both feet. Think I was really going to make a big difference. And now I think I can give her this much. I can give her this kind of competency. I give her this kind of attention, this kind of help. The rest of her life, I might make a reflection or something, or just maybe even help her sort it out in her mind. But I'm always going to go back to literacy.

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• I don't feel like my counselling role is to solve things in any way. But just to be a place where people feel they can talk about it and if they need to know something about where to go, that they know that they can ask. I feel like I can't solve everybody's problems and I feel really frustrated that ... just individual band-aids but that's all I can cope with.

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For many women, the issue of responsibility of the literacy worker—to herself and to women she works with—centres on the process of disclosure, of what we tell each other.

• But [group] got to be too much for us after a while. I got to the point that I couldn't — because I didn't know what to do with it.
• [Women staff] were taking the hurt home with them. And they were sat down at home with this good meal, wondering if they had a meal at all.
• It really gets to be—
• You can't save the world.
• I know that but it doesn't help.

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• If you're sitting down to me and you're telling me that, "I have been sexually abused since the time that I was a child, my mother was a prostitute, I have been a prostitute" and you're saying to me "what do I do, am I crazy .... am I a dirty person, am I a terrible person?" I mean not having the experience of having helped women walk through some of that, it's where we really lacked.

Luckily enough, there were enough connections with women at the transition house so I could call up a feminist counsellor and say, "Look, this is what's going on. What do I say"—"Well, let them talk. Cool it. Don't send them to this person."

But it's like feeling that you're on the edge of a cliff all the time and not quite knowing what's being stirred up here and whether there is special assistance needed or whatever. Not knowing was the biggest ....

• There's a little bit of fear on our part. What's going to be the point? They're going to tell us all this stuff and there's nothing we can do about it. They know there's nothing we can do about it. They just want to tell somebody else. And they don't have anybody they can talk to .... Plus, we don't bring it outside .... As if she sat down with her neighbour and said the same kind of thing well everybody on the street's going to know.

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• They come in with a lot of excess baggage that they don't leave home, so they take it into you. We have no problem with that, but it gets to the point where you can't deal with it because you're not qualified to deal with it. You're not a social worker.

There were days at the beginning that I left here and went home and I was just blown away. You couldn't talk to me home because all these problems that I wanted to solve. I wanted to make everybody happy. And I couldn't do it. It would be really nice to know how to even—not in a professional way—but some way to deal with it that it doesn't grab hold .... I've heard stories and have dealt with a lot of hard mistakes. But you can't continue it.

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• To be just left with those issues, with nowhere to go and no previous association with the women's movement, no framework to deal with it in, that would be pretty hard.

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• I mean how much can you take in and then let it go. A lot of people can leave at five and forget it. I'm not one of those. And then when you have an outside life besides, it's like too much. And you need someone to tell you things so that you can learn how to let that go when you leave. So someone like that would be really good. Because someone like me ....
• Yes, me too. You can't let it go. You bring it home with you.
• They tell you things that are really mind-boggling. Things that you read about and you don't tend to believe and then all of a sudden you're sitting with a person that's living that lifestyle and it's really hard
• even to feel comfortable with your response
• because you can make an awful big mistake. They can walk out through the door and you might never see them again or they took you wrong ....

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It would seem that, in the end, one of the consequences of honouring women's stories, is that our definitions of literacy are radically challenged.

• Working with women and their lives in a literacy program challenges the definition of literacy in a very concrete way.

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• This business of discussion versus supposedly literacy—reading and writing—gets very confusing for me. And I'm still trying to work it out. I'm beginning to feel that the point of view here is really that the expression, the verbal expression, is valued. But that varies depending on who you're with.

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• The women who came to our evening upgrading—I know one that was even afraid to go out and now she talks and she visits around and almost seems a different person. Like when she talks with somebody ... now she's outspoken. She just turned around ....

I didn't see any improvements, great improvements, in her writing and reading skills, but her attitude and the way she acts towards the world is completely different now. And that is what I call literacy. She took control of part of her life that she wasn't controlling before. And to me that's literacy. Learning how to do things for yourself.

And we see a lot of that. It's almost like watching a garden grow. Flowers blooming. That's what excites me is to see other people find themselves, how to watch out for themselves, help themselves. Because, I think especially here, women have to learn how to be proud of themselves, to think they're special, build their self confidence. And once they get over that, they can almost do anything. If they want to do upgrading—they'll succeed. But if they keep on saying, "I'm just a woman. I'm just an Inuk. I don't have any skills ...."

They are special, I think. Until we learn to help them see that, I don't think we can do much more. We can drill them and drill them with mathematics and stuff like that. But what good is that if they won't use it because they lack self confidence?

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• I mean for me literacy means access to information .... And sometimes the information is that there is nowhere you can go.

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• I think that a lot of things get talked about here. They get talked about because something happens and everybody will talk about it on staff. So there seems to be concern. And yet, lots of times, whatever we've thought about or we've said we would do, doesn't go anywhere.

And, actually, like again, I think that some of it has to do with the fact that literacy isn't considered to be—like that isn't the main work of literacy, dealing with that stuff. Although we all know that we do, to some extent. But because it's not clearly acknowledged it's hard to find the time or the place or the way to go through what you wanted to do or what everybody said they wanted you to do. And to actually feel that you're dealing with what you're feeling. And so I think that we probably talk a lot more about issues than we actually act on here ....

I don't really know how to make a transition. I haven't known how to make a transition from a place that was about dealing with that to a place that doesn't have any mechanism for dealing with it. Even though people talk about it ....

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3-2 The women's words, and the themes emerging from them, clarified the issues and assumptions behind this first phase of the research

The national advisory committee members articulated three assumptions and issues going into this research. First, they believed that learning can be an empowering experience for women. Their experience and their understanding of the experience of other women involved in literacy confirmed this belief.

Second, they also believed that women's lack of access to literacy is directly related to the structure of women's lives. The ways in which our lives are organized, the everyday realities that we face as we try to move through and beyond our experience, have a direct impact on whether and how we participate. This is true not only for women literacy students, but also women literacy workers—although at this point, it was understood that women literacy students would be the primary focus.

And, third, they believed that women's experience of violence—violence in all facets of our lives—is a significant factor in whether and how we participate.

Out of these assumptions came particular issues, particular concerns for future work.

First, we need to do action-oriented research to discover how it is that women become empowered as we learn. What is it that happens for us within that process? Second, in order to better understand the ways in which the structure of women's lives restricts our access to participation, we need to document individual women's stories.

And, third, in order to understand how we can work with the violence in our lives, we need to develop a feminist approach that recognizes the power relations between women and men, and the gendered nature of our participation and lack of participation.

We all recognized the importance of naming our assumptions and our understanding of the issues, at the beginning of the research. We also recognized the importance of not allowing these assumptions and understandings to overpower what women might tell us—or might be willing to tell us—about their lives.

For example, in terms of issues around women and violence, we did not consider it either ethical or realistic to expect a researcher to "parachute" into a community for a week, gain the trust of women, and then leave without taking responsibility for following up on questions she may have raised. It was decided at this point, therefore, that the assumption of violence as a determining factor for women was "presumptive." We would wait to see what women identified during our time together.

As I went through the research process, I also developed assumptions and issues. First, I began to believe that it was crucial to include women literacy workers more centrally in the research focus. It became extraordinarily clear that the conditions of women's lives very much affect not only the participation of literacy workers, but the way in which they are able to understand and work with women students.

Second, one of the conditions that women literacy workers face is the gendered relations between themselves, their co-workers, their administration and their students. As they discussed the possibilities of participating in woman-positive activities, they felt a particular vulnerability about themselves as "women," as "other" than men, as targets for many different levels of violence.

Third, out of this particular understanding came the belief that programs that claim a learner-centred approach do not always demonstrate a woman-positive approach. It is possible to be learner-centred and continue to see "women" as "other" than learner.

This led to a fourth realization that turned into a very strong assumption. **Rather than looking at the effect that programs have on women participants, perhaps we need to look at how programs are integrating their awareness of the experience of women.**

These are the assumptions and issues identified during the research

Assumptions of the first phase identified by the advisory committee before the research	Issues of the first phase identified by the advisory committee before the research
• women's lack of access to literacy is directly related to the structure of women's lives	• the need to document individual women's stories to identify how the structure of women's lives restrict their participation in literacy programs
• learning can be an empowering experience for women	• the need for action-oriented research as a tool to identify women's experience within literacy programs
• women's experience of violence in all facets of their lives hinders their participation in literacy programs	• the need to develop a feminist approach to facilitating women's participation in program research
Assumptions of the first phase added by the researcher during the research	**Issues of the first phase added by the researcher during the research**
• women "participants" include women literacy workers as well as students, and those women experience, in their work as well as in their homes and community, the reality of living in a sexist society	• the need to provide expertise and assistance to programs—particularly mixed-gender programs—that are involved in, or want to be involved in, providing woman-positive learning settings
• women who participate in programs—particularly in mixed-gender programs—are in a vulnerable position when they explore woman-positive learning activities	• the need to recognize concerns about the experience and participation of men as they relate to women in the programs
• programs that have a learner-centred approach are not necessarily woman-positive	• the need to understand the role of feminist critical consciousness in the context of literacy programming
• not only can literacy programs affect women's lives, but women's lives must affect the practices of literacy programs	• the need to document the experience of literacy programs involved in woman-positive learning activities

When programs—workers, students, administrators, board members, funders—become aware of the conditions of women's lives, what do they do? Do they change their programs and themselves so that women's experience is included? And, if they do, how is that inclusion allowed to influence what actually happens in the program?

Or, does women's experience continue to be marginalized within the program, not changing it? And, if women's experience continues to be marginalized, how is that exclusion allowed to influence what actually happens in the program?

Out of these assumptions, and the questions arising from them, came the identification of several issues.

First, women in programs, especially mixed-gender programs, need support in providing woman-positive learning settings.

Second, the reality of women's experience within these programs means that men's experience and participation needs to be recognized, identified, understood and acted upon—preferably by men with men.

Third, the awareness that learner-centred programs are not necessarily woman-positive means that we need to understand how feminist critical consciousness can be applied to the context of literacy programming.

And, fourth, we need to document the experience of those literacy programs that are involved in woman-positive programming so that we can learn more about how to go forward with more understanding, ease and effectiveness.

3-3 Reflecting on the themes, issues and assumptions led to certain interpretations of this first phase work

When I remember my conversations with women across the country, hear the words in which they told their stories and recall the stories that were not put into words nor onto tape, I want to ask one particular question: How can we ensure that the disempowering conditions in women's lives are not replicated by the activities—either conscious or unconscious—of literacy programs?

As feminists, we know that becoming conscious of the ways in which we work must begin with an investigation of our own experience. We can move from the intentional understanding of our concrete experience to reflect on how it connects with the experience of others. Through an analysis of the way our experience is constructed within the context of our social and political realities, we can begin to develop a vision of how things might change. We can then move into an active exploration of change and its implications.

If literacy workers are not given the opportunity to do this kind of reflection, analysis, visioning and strategic work within their own lives and within their programs, then how can they support other participants in those programs to work on the same issues?

Women as literacy workers and as literacy students share a common experience. While it is important that they also recognize the differences in their experience—the different locations of their privilege and oppression—the commonalities must be understood in order that the programs can work on the level of social and political as well as individual change.

Just as students learn from their experience, so do workers teach or facilitate from their experience. We cannot take an appropriate leadership or animating role in working with women in our communities until we have explored the meaning of our own lives.

Yet, to do that exploration within a workplace without support is asking women literacy workers to put themselves in a very

threatening situation.

It is difficult to help others discover the strength of their voices when we are speaking in whispers ourselves.

As researchers, literacy workers, advocates, we all need to have the support of others as well as the personal and technical skills to move on. Especially if we are going to work on issues of violence toward women—economic, intellectual, spiritual, emotional and physical violence—we need shared insight and support, as well as resources.

In the first stage of this research we have become more aware of the impact woman-positive initiatives might have on program literacy workers and students. Those who participated in this first stage seem to be clear that they want and need a "next step" beyond looking at and reflecting on what is already happening. They want to find out, in a more systematic way, what actually happens when they introduce and/or maintain woman-positive, learner-centred activities in their programs and organizations.

What has happened in the past is that woman-positive initiatives have been undertaken in different programs across the country. In some cases, they have been considered successful. In others, they have not. However, the goals and objectives, planning processes, programming and evaluations have not been undertaken in a way that allows others to share in the process. The lack of systematic documentation or, in some cases, conscious planning, means that the usefulness for the particular program is limited or, for the wider literacy community, lost.

It is imperative that the research component—the investigation and documentation of the impact of these activities on the program—receive financial support. With financial support for the training of literacy workers in research theory and methods, for planning, for conscious investigation of the process, for documentation and for evaluation, woman-positive program initiatives might realistically have a research component that will make them more useful for others as well as more effective for those involved.

In order to begin envisioning the second stage of the research project, we have to remember the funding structure under which we are currently working. The National Literacy Secretariat does not fund program activities, although it will fund projects such as research, material production, awareness and training. Unless other funding is available to the program for doing the actual activity, we would need to consider that:

- **the activity would be part of ongoing operations of the program or organization, and**
- **the research component would be supported by project funding from the National Literacy Secretariat in a proposal sponsored and coordinated by CCLOW.**

3-4 These questions focus the understanding coming out of the questions, the issues and the assumptions

- What happens within programs when woman-positive activities take place with the support of administration or management, staff, volunteers and students? How do the programs change?
- What can we learn about "learner-centred" and "woman-positive" approaches by carrying out research around the activities outlined above? How are they different in theory and in practice?
- What is the experience of women who participate in woman-positive activities within literacy programs? What is the experience of those who do not participate?

4-1 The questions that can inform the process of the second, action stage of the research

- What do we mean when we talk about "woman-positive" activities?
- What does it mean to consciously include woman-positive activities within programs and organizations?
- How do we negotiate doing woman-positive activities within our workplaces?
- What training, resources, structures and processes do we need?
- What will particular activities look like? How can they be "researched"?
- How can the women, the program and the community benefit?
- What are the costs to the women, to the program and to the community within which both are located?
- What can we learn in order to go forward in the future with increased benefits and reduced costs?
- How can we share our learning with other members of the literacy community across the country?

4 What do we want to do next in this research? What would the second, participatory stage look like?

The first stage of this research indicates that, building on the theoretical base and experiential reports of women's experience, we can now plan, implement, document and evaluate the process of introducing and maintaining woman-positive activities in a variety of programs.

The activities will be consciously chosen as woman-positive and they will be undertaken as an action/participatory research project. This means that we will have an opportunity to learn about the experience of women and programs in a way that will allow us to analyze the results and strategize for future activities that benefit both the programs and women literacy students and workers.

The approach suggested for the second stage focusses on how the women who participate in literacy programs—women literacy students and women literacy workers—can affect change within their programs. The methodology suggested allows them to plan, implement, document and evaluate a woman-positive activity that fits within their program mandate and structure.

These activities will require varying degrees of commitment from the administration or management of the program, from the staff and from the students. However, they will all ensure that the experience of women becomes visible within the program or organization.

Not all the programs may be able to actually implement or complete planned activities. Because this is a research project, these activities will not be seen as "failures." There will be much we will be able to learn from the actual process. This is one of the pragmatic reasons for choosing an action/participatory research methodology.

An action/participatory research methodology also means that the programs, through initial contacts and the training workshops, will be closely involved in the planning process for the research as well as the planning, implementation, documentation and evaluation of the activities and the second stage project as a whole.

Because of the action/participatory research model, those who already participate in the programs will carry through the activities. These participants will be expecting to see change and resistance to change because of the activities. The documentation of the process of change and the resistance to change, and the analysis of the documentation will form the final product of the research.

4-2 The commitment of CCLOW for the second stage

The sponsorship by CCLOW will include:

- project development and administration,
- active outreach for participants,
- formation of a national advisory committee, and
- hiring the research co-ordinator.

The research co-ordinator will provide two women contact literacy participants from each program with:

- assistance in developing administrative, staff and student support,
- background materials that provide a theoretical framework for the work,
- three participatory workshops for program participants to provide training in research methods, a process for choosing activities and a process for planning an activity,
- training and a process for documentation of the activity within the programs,
- training and a process for evaluation of the activity and the project as a whole,
- two teleconferences for information and support to the contact women,
- co-ordination of information, communication and documentation, and
- production of the final product of the project as decided upon by participants.

4-3 Possible program activities for the second stage

- a women's support group in which both literacy students and workers could discuss how their work in the program has affected their lives and how they see their lives affecting the program
- planning and holding a two-day workshop for all the participants of a program on the role of women workers and students in the past, present and future
- a women-only class or group that meets regularly to work on literacy skills in the context of their lives in their particular community (The curriculum would be developed by the group as a whole.)
- using the development and introduction of a sexual harassment policy as a piece of curriculum that would raise gender issues in a program or organization
- reviewing and selecting some literacy materials that would be of particular interest to women and introducing them to the program or organization
- developing a video in which women literacy students and workers discuss how and why they are involved in literacy work and how they see their experience, as women, affecting the program
- women literacy workers and students producing a collection of writing, drawing, photography, etc., that talks about their lives
- developing and implementing a planning process that will lead to some formal consideration of women's experience within the program and/or organization
- organizing a group to take part in International Women's Day activities, including some participation in the organizing by the women's community to help raise consciousness around literacy and publicity materials

4-4 The commitment of the programs that agree to participate in the second stage

The programs that would be considered and encouraged to participate are those that indicate a willingness and an ability to:

- commit themselves to an up-front, woman-positive activity and
- approach this activity, for a period of time, as action research.

A deliberate effort will be made to ensure that programs involved in the research project come from a variety of geographic locations, program perspectives and community sizes.

Organized and active outreach will be done using the extensive CCLOW membership to facilitate the participation of community-based programs, one-to-one volunteer programs, workplace programs, bridging programs, immigrant women's programs (including mother tongue or English as a Second Language), union programs, and college and school board programs.

The participating literacy workers within the program

Two women — two literacy workers or, in some cases perhaps, one literacy worker and one other program participant (student, worker, board member, volunteer) — will need to agree to be the contacts in the program or organization. They will commit themselves to be involved in the national workshops and in the planning, implementation, documentation and evaluation of the activity within their program or organization.

As part of the planning for the activity, the contact women would receive assistance in negotiating the time for participation as part of their job description. It is important to note that the time required for the research component of the activity—the half-day per week spent on documentation, evaluation and the participation in three training workshops—will receive financial support of $150/day. The resources and salary for the actual activity will need to come out of the program.

Training for action research with woman-positive activities

The contact women will be brought together from interested programs and organizations to look at their own experience as women and as literacy program participants.

In the first workshop they will be given an opportunity and the tools to reflect upon their experience and understand how that experience connects with the experience of other women—those present and those available to us through written stories of their lives. Moving to an analysis of how our experience as women fits within our particular programs and organizations, our communities, and our political and social realities, we can begin to develop a vision of how we would like to work with other participants in our literacy programs and communities.

At this point, we will begin to imagine a research project within each setting that will provide for a consciously woman-positive activity that could be used as a catalyst for change within the program and the larger community. We will discuss how to plan, implement, document and evaluate such an activity within the context of action research—research that will ultimately be useful to the particular program and the general literacy community, as well as to the individuals involved.

The program's agreement to take part in the research activity

The literacy workers, the literacy students and the administration (management or board) will all need to agree to a statement of intent around the activity, recognizing it as a woman-positive activity and also as a piece of action/participatory research.

All the participants must be willing to see the activity as potentially changing the program as a whole, not simply as a way to have a positive impact on individual students or workers. The women's voices that emerge

from the experience must be seen as tools to re-structure the program so that it is more inclusive of this experience.

It will not be enough to simply listen to women. Given the nature of action research, if the words cannot be accepted and worked with as transformational, they will need to be consciously rejected. That will have implications for the program—the literacy workers perhaps even more than the students.

The activity will be determined by the participants in the program or organization—the literacy students, literacy workers and administration. It is expected that some will take place over a three or six-month period, others over twelve months.

Involvement in the decision-making and research documentation process

The program will have to agree that both literacy students and literacy workers will be involved in the decision-making process that leads to the choice of the activity, in terms of content **and** process. Also, they will both need to be involved in the documentation and evaluation process.

Everyone involved in the activity will have to agree that the documentation of the research process will be available to share with other literacy students, workers and administrators and to be a part of the final project report.

It is expected that the documentation for the activites will include reflection and analysis on the process, as well as on materials, and will possibly include videos, policy, photostories and writings. Some funding has been estimated for this. It is hoped that some activities may receive funding from other sources for some of the final materials.

Do you know of any programs

that might be interested in participating

in the second stage of this research project?

Please let them know what is happening—

or give CCLOW a call at (416) 699-1909.

5 Appendices

5-1 The Canadian Congress of Learning Opportunities for Women (CCLOW)—the sponsor

The Canadian Congress for Learning Opportunities for Women is a national, voluntary, feminist organization with networks in every province and territory. CCLOW advocates equality between women and men by promoting equal participation in our educational, political, economic, legal, social, and cultural systems. To overcome discrimination based on gender, age, race, class, ethnicity, and sexual orientation, CCLOW focusses on improving educational and learning systems.

To achieve its mandate, CCLOW:

- advocates for the improvement of educational and learning programs, and consults with governments and institutions,
- researches women's learning issues,
- develops programs and learning tools, creates and implements innovative learning models,
- shares and exchanges information, and
- organizes public education, networks, and co-operative activities.

Since 1979, CCLOW has encouraged the development of literacy policy, practice, materials and programs that will respond to the learning needs of women and the reality of their daily lives. It has represented and articulated the particular needs and concerns of adult women learners when working in coalition with other organizations.

CCLOW has sponsored and produced several research studies and reports about women's experience with adult literacy and basic education programs.

Its **Learning Resource Centre** has increased its holdings of materials related to women and literacy and responds to requests for information from across Canada.

The CCLOW 1987 brochure **Let's talk about women and literacy** identifies some of the barriers which block women's participation in literacy programs and proposes ways in which literacy programs can be made more accessible to women.

The CCLOW project **Literacy materials for women** is in the final stages of production. It identifies, evaluates and lists Canadian English literacy materials for women.

CCLOW research on women and literacy has already identified many issues

In the 1970s, Dorothy MacKeracher and others produced **Adult basic education for women: A model for policy development**. In the early 1980s, Paula De Coito produced **Women and adult basic education in Canada: An exploratory study**. These studies documented the needs of women students:

- flexible program schedules,
- curriculum and literacy materials,
- affordable and available childcare and transportation, and
- accessible counselling and other support services.

In 1988, Susan Wismer produced **Women's education and training in Canada: A policy analysis** that indicates that women's participation in education and training programs and in positive employment requires policy development and resources for policy implementation. The priority policy changes include:

- equal pay for work of equal value and
- equal employment opportunity.

However, policy change is not enough. Wismer outlines the essential need for restructuring work and family in formal and non-formal sectors of the economy. CCLOW, she says, must focus on the needs of doubly disadvantaged women—women who are poor, who have low educational levels, who are disabled, who are immigrants, who are members of the native peoples or who come from geographically isolated areas.

5-2 CCLOW national advisory committee and the researcher

CCLOW has an executive director, Aisla Thomson, who works out of the main office in Toronto. She developed the project with Gladys Watson, who was on staff with CCLOW at the time, and with an advisory committee from across the country.

The advisory committee members are CCLOW members active as literacy and upgrading workers, as researchers in the area of women's literacy and upgrading, and as executive members of the organization.

Pramila Aggarwal is trying to make sense of the multi-dimensional location of immigrant women in Canadian society through her work on the ground and academic research. She has been involved with education and training of immigrant women workers for seven years. She is on the staff of Metro Labour Education Centre, Toronto.

Evelyn Battell has been an Adult Basic Education instructor for 14 years and is concerned with providing options and dignity for both instructors and students.

Dawn Elliot is a member of CCLOW's Board of Directors. For over 10 years she has developed and implemented community programs for teen mums, transient women and youth.

Frances Ennis is a co-founder of Rabbitown Literacy Program, a community-based adult literacy program in St. John's. For the last 15 years she has been involved in community development and adult education.

Lynn Fogwill is a "founding mother" of CCLOW, a past board member and current NWT –CCLOW Coordinator. She is Manager for Literacy and Adult Education programs for the Department of Education, Government of the Northwest Territories and is deeply commited to social justice work, including women's issues in Canadian society.

Michele Kuhlmann is on staff with East End Literacy, Toronto, and is particularly concerned with literacy issues in the family.

Kathleen Rockhill teaches feminist studies in the Department of Adult Education at the Ontario Instiute for Studies in Education, Toronto. She has done research in literacy since 1972.

Susan Witter is Dean of Continuing Education at Fraser Valley College in British Columbia. She is a past president of CCLOW. Susan has a long-standing comittment to promoting access to learing opportunities for educationally disadvantaged women.

Two other women, members of CCLOW and well-versed in research issues for women, literacy and training, also played an advisory role at a crucial time in the process. **Elaine Gaber-Katz** and **Susan Wismer** worked with the project for a day of consultation and clarification at the midway mark of the data collection.

Although these women cannot be held responsible for the final product, their experience and response is embedded in the work.

The researcher is **Betty-Ann Lloyd**, a white, middle-class woman with experience in secretarial work, weaving, school bus driving, mothering, make-work projects, community journalism, CBC radio current affairs, lovering, university lecturing, feminist community activism, graduate work in the social organization of knowledge, volunteer tutoring in a community-based literacy program, policy research in literacy, bureaucratic co-ordination of provincial community and workplace literacy activities, freelance research, and clear language and design consulting. She has lived almost all of her adult life in Nova Scotia—in rural Cape Breton and in Halifax. She was born on the prairies and raised in the suburbs of many large cities across Canada. She is currently a Ph.D. student at Dalhousie University doing interdisciplinary work in feminist research, critical theory, language and power, social welfare policies and training opportunities for women who are single mothers on social assistance.

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